Games / Anime / Multimedia

Holiday Gift Guide • Valkyria Chronicles & Metal Slug 7 posters!

play®

Tokyo Game Show
Afro Samurai
Mirror's Edge
Sonic Unleashed
Prince of Persia
Resistance 2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI SPECIAL!

PERSONA 4

Exclusive first review of Persona 4
Special Shin Megami Tensei: Imagine Online Q&A

December 2008

$5.99US

12>

0 71486 03836 8

HUMANITY NEW
SHRAPNEL™
ARISTEIA RISING

Insurrection rages across the planets. The Solar System trembles. And only a fallen hero, lost in exile, can save mankind's last free colony from genocide.

Samantha Vijaya thought she was finished with war. But war isn't finished with her.

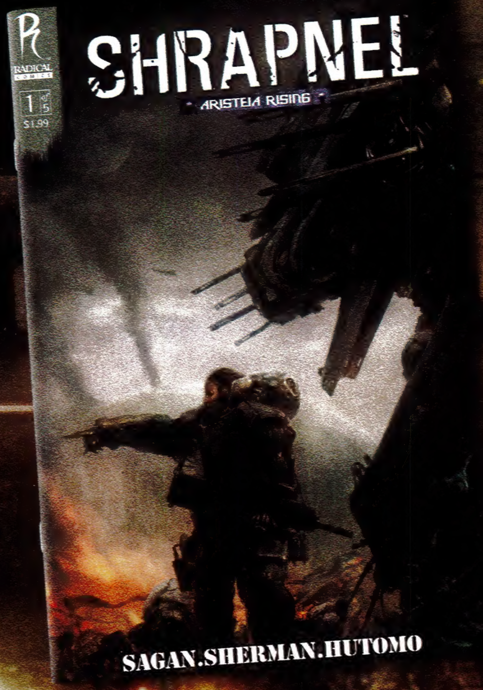
HAS A EMPIRE

"THE CINEMATIC BEAUTY OF THE ART ONLY REINFORCES THE KINETIC FORCE OF THE ACTION."

LOUIS LETERRIER (DIRECTOR OF *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*)

RADICAL COMICS
1 of 5
$1.99
SHRAPNEL
ARISTEIA RISING
SAGAN.SHERMAN.HUTOMO

48-PAGE FIRST ISSUE FOR ONLY $1.99


RADICAL COMICS
1 of 5
$1.99
SHRAPNEL
ARISTEIA RISING
SAGAN.SHERMAN.HUTOMO

CH200 R
40KU-RE
200

AVAILABLE JANUARY 2009

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY FROM WWW.RADICALCOMICS.COM

Shrapnel ™ © 2008 Zombie Studios and Radical Publishing.
Radical Interactive, Inc., is a subsidiary of Radical Publishing, Inc. Radical logo is a trademark of Radical Publishing, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

RADICAL PUBLISHING RADICAL INTERACTIVE zombie studios

Resistance: Retribution™

Wall-E

echochrome™

Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2

LEGO Batman: The Videogame

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

Shaun White Snowboarding

Ben 10: Alien Force

God of War®: Chains of Olympus
ILI DOGS
PINK'S
SINCE 1939
PINK'S
DOGS
PINK'S
HOFFY
SONY

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee® 2

FIFA 09

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

BUZZ! is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Relentless Software. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Resistance: Retribution is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Insomniac Games. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. God of War is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2007 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Ratchet & Clank is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by High Impact Games. ©2007 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Echochrome is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PlayStation," "PS" Family logo, and "PSP" are registered trademarks and the PlayStation Network logo is a service mark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All games featured are trademarked and copyrighted properties of their respective publishers and/or licensors.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

Secret Agent Clank

Crisis Core - Final Fantasy VII -

Madden NFL 09

BUZZ!™ Master Quiz

Rosehill 2
Logan Square
Downtown 3
Midnight Club: LA Remix

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Ratchet & Clank®: Size Matters

EVERYWHERE JUST GOT BETTER

Whoever you are. Wherever you play. Whatever you're into. The PSP®-3000 system will get you where you want to go. Built around an ultra-crisp and super-widescreen display, there's simply no better way to play all the best games and biggest movies. So check out our lineup and grab yourself a PSP system. Because everywhere just got better.

PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION Network

Letter from the Editor

Just not enough time!

This is the time of year during which it's become a cliché to express "how crazy it is that there are so many great games coming out!" And then followed by "there just isn't remotely enough time to play all of them!"

Relationships around the world are about to be ruined as the significant other begs their lover to put down the controller. It really is a wonderful time to be a gamer. I apologize to my girlfriend in advance.

What strikes me as especially enjoyable about this year's holiday rush—and the year of games in general—is the appealing variety of what's out there. There may not be the same level of quality we saw last year, but I find myself enjoying a broader range of games, whether it's uncompromising adventure in Tomb Raider, brilliant puzzle-platforming in Braid, signature duck-and-cover grit in Gears of War 2, the tower-defense addiction in Pixel Junk Monsters. And then there's old-school in grand cinematic clothing in Metal Gear Solid 4, classic shooting in Geometry Wars, exhilarating first-person adventuring in Mirror's Edge, platforming engineering in the wonderfully imaginative Little Big Planet. And all those smaller games like Castle Crashers and Bionic Commando stealing thunder from the bigger releases. And can't-wait games I haven't found that time to play yet, like Left 4 Dead—the makers of Half-Life 2 are back with an original!—Fallout 3 (epochal says the most hyper critic), Damnation (please make good on a great premise!), FIFA 09 (a sports game I really want to play!).

That's half the list. And then there's *your* list. Maybe this year really is about to overshadow what was a great year in 2007. In fact, break it down internet-style, no arguments here if you want to call 2008 our best yet in the progressively improving world of games.

"There just isn't remotely enough time to play all of them" is the truth, but there's a truth there that is a real problem that goes beyond dropped responsibilities. A lot of game developers still struggle to make the kind of production that is a financial and personal success. There are indeed so many options out there, games take so much time to play, the audience is broadening all the time and looking for even more personalized options—you ultimately can only digest so much, leaving the business model in the games industry a continual work in progress.

With online becoming a bigger deal and co-op structure extending the life of games out even further, I wonder if the purchasing decisions of the most avid gamers are going to continually diminish? It used to be I'd be done with a game after the already too-long ten hour adventure ended, but now, instead of going onto the next experience, I'm playing with friends, downloading even more content, going back through the single-player one more time in co-op.

> "Relationships around the world are about to be ruined..."

Gamemakers are constantly trying to give us more options, more hours, more content. No complaints there. But the more you keep me in your world, the less time I have for a new one. And the more you use artificial means—a topic for another day—to keep me in your world, the less interest I have in moving to the next one.

I'm wondering if I'll ever even have time for Fallout 3. Metal Gear 4 is still waiting for me to finish the final Chapter. It's getting harder and harder to find time to finish most games, or to want to finish most games. Somebody needs to explore the ADHD gamer phenomenon. Happy Thanksgiving!

Brady Fiechter

play magazine staff

Editorial

Publisher **Dave Halverson**
Editor in Chief **Brady Fiechter**
Senior Editor **Greg Orlando**
Associate Editors **Heather Campbell, Eric Patterson, Casey Loe**
Associate Anime Editor **Bill Gray**
PC Editor **Mike Griffin**
Japanese Correspondents **Nick Des Barres, Dai Kohama**
Contributing Editors **Matt Cabral, Evan Shamoon**
Jr. Gameplay Associate **Hunter Halverson**
Copy Editors **Jennifer Hoche, Daniel Campisi, Bill Gray**

Design

Art Director **Michael Hobbs**
Associate Art Director **Chin "Nelson" Lui**
Additional Design **Eric Patterson**

Advertising and Sales

Director of Advertising & Promotions
Bethany Bell
bbell@playmagazine.com
818.470.3754

Executive Director, Integrated Marketing
Shawn Sanders
ssanders@playmagazine.com

play magazine online

Online Content Manager
Eric Patterson
webmaster@playmagazine.com

Corporate

Director Of Operations
Julie Halverson
jhalverson@playmagazine.com
818.707.7786 x 104

Advertising and Marketing Coordinator
Daniel Campisi
dcampisi@playmagazine.com
818.707.7786 x 106

Subscriptions and Customer Service
(in U.S.) 800-694-6506
(outside U.S.) 818-487-2036
email: play@espcomp.com

play magazine Offices
Fusion Publishing, Inc.
29219 Canwood St., Suite 100
Agoura Hills, Ca 91301
Tel 818.707.7786 Fax 818.707.7212

play magazine partner

ALIENWARE

Legal Mumbo Jumbo

PLAY™ (ISSN 1537-7539) is published monthly by Fusion Publishing, Inc., 29219 Canwood St., Suite 100, Agoura Hills, CA 91301. Volume 7, Issue 12. Single issue rates: $5.99, yearly newsstand value: $71.88. The one year (12 issue) subscription rate is $19.99 in the U.S., $44.99 in Canada, and $64.99 in all other foreign locales. Checks must be made payable in U.S. currency only to PLAY. Send address changes to: P.O. BOX 16567, North Hollywood, CA 91615-9684 or email play@espcomp.com For subscription service questions, call (800)694-6506. We periodically make lists of our customers available to mailers of goods and services that may interest you. If you do not wish to receive such mailings, please write to us and include a copy of your mailing label. Please allow 6-8 weeks before receiving your first issue, as well as for any subscription changes to take place on any existing subscription. The editors and the publisher are not responsible for unsolicited materials; all unsolicited material becomes the property of Fusion Publishing, Inc.

Without limiting the rights of copyrights reserved herein, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written notice of Fusion publishing, Inc. To reuse any material in this publication, obtain a permission request form by contacting Fusion Publishing, Inc. at (818)707-7786 [phone] or (818)707-7212 [fax]. © Fusion Publishing, Inc. All Rights Reserved, Play™, Fusion Publishing™, Play: Girls of Gaming™, Play: The Calendar™, Fusion Publishing Presents™ are trademarks and copyrights of Fusion Publishing, Inc.™ and © for all other products and the characters contained therein are owned by the respective trademark and copyright owners. All materials listed in this magazine are subject to manufacturers change and the publisher assumes no responsibility for such changes.

Canada Post Publication Mail Agreement 41464579 , undeliverables
2-7496 Bath Road, Mississauga,Ontario L4T 1L2

intel
Core™ 2
Extreme
inside™
Extreme Performance

ALIENWARE® PRESENTS

BREED

SCENE 5: TRANSMISSION

SCENE 5: TRANSMISSION

In a flash of light, the Area-51 ALX is transported instantly from the chamber. It's only upon it reappearance that you begin to realize the full scope of what you've discovered. The final pieces are falling into place. Only one question remains – How does it end?

PREVIOUS SCENES, WALLPAPERS & EXCLUSIVE BREED RINGTONES AVAILABLE AT:

ALIENWARE.COM/BREED

The Area-51® ALX desktop is Powered by the Intel® Core™ 2 Extreme Processor.

Alienware, Ali[illegible]en head logo and Area-51 are [illegible]arks or trademarks of Alienware Corporation. Alienware can not be held responsible for errors in photography or typography. Availability may change without notice. Actual case may vary in design. The lighting color shown on the Area-51series [illegible] are generated by Alienware's Alien[illegible] Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. AMD, the AMD Arrow logo, ATI, the ATI logo and combinations thereof, ATI Radeon, CrossFireX, AMD Smarter Choice logo and The Ultimate Visual Experience are trademarks of Advanced Micro Devices. All other registe[illegible]rks and trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

Back Flip
Slide
Parry

A New Hero Emerges—Master the elite, acrobatic fighting style of history's most agile warrior.

An Epic, Open World—Your choices determine just how the story evolves.

A Deadly New Ally—Your partner, Elika, is your greatest weapon against the darkness.

"A SURE CONTENDER FOR GAME OF THE YEAR" – IGN

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

© 2008 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Based on Prince of Persia® created by Jordan Mechner. Ubisoft, Ubi.com, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. Prince of Persia is a trademark of Jordan Mechner in the U.S. and/or other countries used under license by Ubisoft Entertainment. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

Destiny awaits you...
A LEGEND IS BORN
SWING
ROOF RUN
GRIP FALL
DUEL
WALL RUN
XBOX 360 LIVE
PRINCE of PERSIA
PRINCE of PERSIA
TEEN
ESRB
PLAYSTATION 3
UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA®
DECEMBER 4TH, 2008
WWW.PRINCEOFPERSIAGAME.COM
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360 LIVE
UBISOFT

contents

038

004 EDITORIAL
012 INK
016 DEVELOPER SOUNDOFF
018 NPD DATABASE
020 GAMING CULTURE
022 FUTURE OF IPHONE
024 SONY HOME
026 COVER STORY: PERSONA 4
036 EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD
038 PRINCE OF PERSIA
046 TOKYO GAME SHOW
062 REVIEWS
063 FAR CRY 2
064 LAST REMNANT
065 NEED FOR SPEED

026

TOKYO GAME SHOW 2008
10/9·10·11·12
10:00～17:00
docomo
CESA
日経BP社
046

Try Netflix free for two weeks. NETFLIX

The Ultimate in Social Entertainment.

The New Xbox Experience

Get instant streaming* and watch DVD rentals on your Xbox 360®.

Connect with friends as you share games, photos, and more.

Enjoy the best in entertainment right in your living room.

NETFLIX
UNO RUSH
Pick an avatar as a starting point

XBOX LIVE.

See the New Xbox Experience at xbox.com/nxe.

*Streaming instantly from Netflix requires Xbox LIVE Gold membership and a Netflix unlimited subscription plan. Hard drive is recommended for Xbox LIVE, and is required for some features. See www.xbox.com/live.

Jump in.

XBOX 360.

contents

PIRANDELLO/KRUGER
SECURITY
066

066 MIRROR'S EDGE
069 CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR
070 FABLE 2
072 SONIC UNLEASHED
076 FALLOUT 3
078 BANJO: NUTS AND BOLTS
080 TOMB RAIDER
082 VALKYRIA CHRONICLES
084 RESISTANCE 2
086 CASTLEVANIA: JUDGMENT
087 GUITAR HERO
090 MONSTER LAB
092 MOBILE
094 PLAY PC
102 ANIME
106 THE SHOP: BUYER'S GUIDE
112 BACK OF THE BOOK

I LOVE THE SMELL OF FUN IN THE MORNING.
Avoid baddies. Even cardboard ones.
Swing past death with a smile on your face.
It's not about winning or losing. Oh wait, yes it is.
5,740
It's unanimous. People like fun.
the best of E3 GAME CRITICS AWARD 08 WINNER
GAMESPOT E3'08 EDITORS' CHOICE WINNER
BEST OF E3 AWARDS '08
LittleBIGPlanet™
Fun shall overcome.
EVERYONE
E
Comic Mischief
Mild Cartoon Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ONLY ON PLAYSTATION 3
PLAYSTATION Network

"PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The PLAYSTATION Network Logo is a service mark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. LittleBigPlanet ©2007 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Media Molecule. LittleBigPlanet is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe.

Riddick heads back to the Bay

Atari=salvation

Thanks to Activision joining forces with Vivendi, a handful of the companies' games have been left to fend for themselves in the open market, waiting for a new publisher to save the day. And save the day Atari has done with The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena. The game was originally conceived as more of a higher resolution port of the original Xbox first-person adventure, Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, but has now turned into something redirected well beyond the initial reports: Atari has officially announced a brand-new single player campaign to be added to the mix, along with a re-imagining of the original release and multiplayer functionality. Just how much new is joining the old is still up in the air, but rest assured: Riddick is back in Spring 2009, on next-gen, and the original Swedish developer Starbreeze is in full command of its completion.

Now can someone please come out and officially announce a new home for Tim Schafer's Brutal Legend?

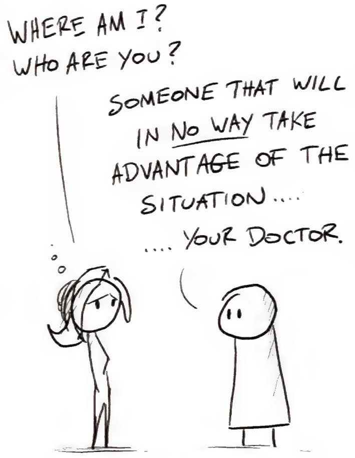
COPYRIGHT © 2008 PHILLIP M JACKSON PMJ

THE GAMING CLICHÉ SPOTTER GUIDE

AMNESIA

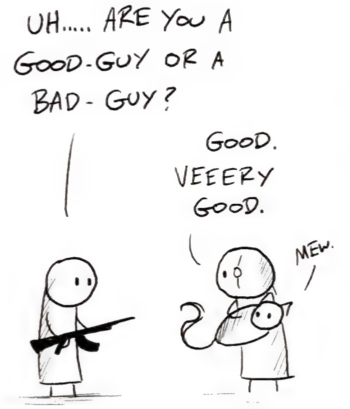
Certain plot mechanics are the tool of a lazy writer.
"And it was all a dream." Provides the most unfulfilling end to a tale, while the start of a story immediately sinks into mediocrity when the main character wakes up and doesn't know who or where they are.
How cheap is the motivation to explore in your game?

The Player Character knows who they are from the get go.
The only amnesic in the game is an NPC.


WHERE AM I? WHO ARE YOU?
SOMEONE THAT WILL IN NO WAY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.... ....YOUR DOCTOR.

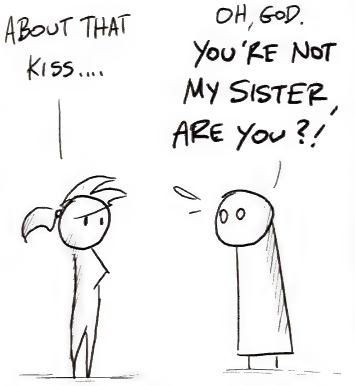
☐ 500pts

The Player Character does not become an amnesic until later in the game, making for interesting interactions with previously encountered characters.


UH..... ARE YOU A GOOD-GUY OR A BAD-GUY?
GOOD. VEEERY GOOD.
MEW.

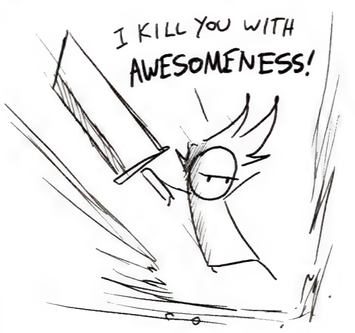
☐ 100pts

The Player Character has amnesia, but the resulting tale is well told, with layers of the character's past being revealed using the tried and tested "Onion-Skin" mechanic.


ABOUT THAT KISS....
OH, GOD. YOU'RE NOT MY SISTER, ARE YOU?!

☐ 50pts

The Player Character has amnesia simply so the writer can draw out every aspect of the game's narrative in crayon.
There is also a 99% chance that the character will be recruited by the Royal Guard, have latent fighting skills and attract the attentions of the Princess.


I KILL YOU WITH AWESOMENESS!

☐ 5pts

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI®
P4 Persona®4
Rank up!!
Rank 6
Fool • Investigation Team
07/10 Daytime
> What kind of student you here...?
Teddie
But spending time with you all sparked my curiosity about this world!
SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI PERSONA 4 VISUAL DATA
PlayStation 2
INCLUDES BONUS DISC
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
"...the PS2's last great JRPG franchise." - GameSpot

Own this deluxe release that includes the game AND soundtrack CD!

Enhanced Social Link System

Now build relationships with ALL of your teammates.

Unprecedented Team Control

Command each party member individually in battle.

Pre-order Now!

Get the 100-page Art Book AND the Deluxe 2-Disc Set!

In Stores Dec. 9th!

Alcohol Reference
Animated Blood
Language
Partial Nudity
Sexual Themes
Violence

PlayStation®2

Visit www.atlus.com/persona4

ATLUS®
WWW.ATLUS.COM

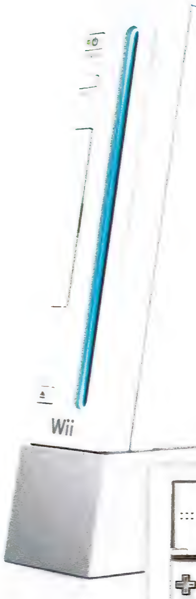
© 2008 ATLUS. SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI, SMT and Persona are registered trademarks of Atlus U.S.A., Inc. © 2008 Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The rating icons are trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association.

SUBARU
PIAA
RALLY TEAM

Where'd you learn how to drive, the arcade?

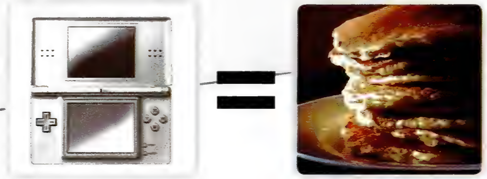
It's been a crazy time in Japan lately when it comes to videogame players. First up is a young girl from Osaka who, while driving, hit a 58-year-old man and drug him over 590 feet. Even worse, the girl is only 14 years old, and was taking this first joyride after having become confident in her driving ability from her extensive playing of arcade racing games. Then, up north in Tokyo, a 43-year-old woman was arrested for killing her husband; her virtual husband, that is. The woman had been "married" to a 33-year-old office worker in the online game Maple Story, and when her digital hubby dumped her, she took her revenge by logging into his account and killing his character. When the man complained to police, she was brought in on suspicion of illegal computer access and electronic data manipulation. So, lessons to be learned: driving games don't really teach you how to drive, and wives scorned can be a scary thing, even virtual ones.

It's a Console Nation



Nintendo is doing alright, so the reports go. It seems the company can't seem to make enough Wiis to go around (34.55 million since launch), the remarkably successful DS is already getting an update, and software sales remain as strong as ever. Nintendogs has dropped around 20 million units worldwide, and the DS has now hit over 84.33 million units shipped, besting the 81.36 million units shipped of the Game Boy Advance.

Microsoft also officially alluded to success in their own way, shipping 22.5 million Xbox 360s through September of this year, which is on the way to topple the original Xbox's 24.7 million worldwide. Of course, ultimately success comes in the complex arena of software sales, but there's a long ways to go, and it's not even Christmas yet. Crap economy be damned.

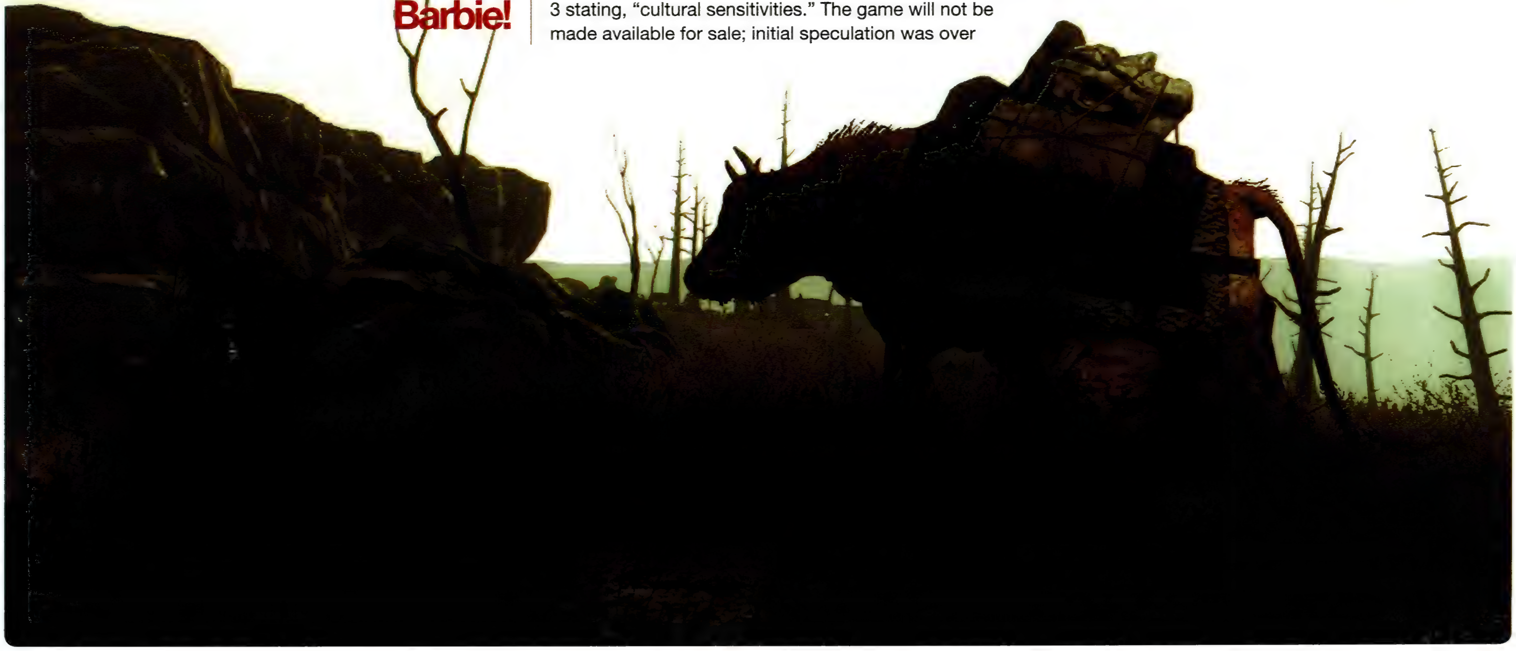


oops files: In last month's issue our Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm screens ended up in the Naruto: The Broken Bond layout. Our apologies to Namco Bandai and Ubisoft respectively.

Naked Sackboy offends Malibu Barbie!

LittleBigPlanet got temporarily yanked right before its release date due to the sensitive nature of two Qur'an passages married to a musical track in the Swinging Safari level. The tracks were deleted and sentenced to life in the Phantom Zone, Sackboy hit the street running, and the planet is once again safe. Not to be outdone Microsoft India followed suit ejecting Fallout 3 stating, "cultural sensitivities." The game will not be made available for sale; initial speculation was over the possible religious backlash with the depiction of mutant two-headed cows in the game, called Brahmin.

Back to LittleBigPlanet. How long will it be before someone creates an entire level based on the Qur'an and gets a little *too* creative? Restrain yourselves people!



YOUR WEAPONS. YOUR JOURNEY.
THE WORLD'S FINAL STAND.
ALONE IN THE DARK
INFERNO
CENTRALDARK.COM
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence
PLAYSTATION 3
eden GAMES
ATARI

Alone in the Dark © 2008 Atari Interactive, Inc. All rights reserved. Marketed and distributed by Atari, Inc., New York, NY. Developed by Eden Games SAS. Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks owned by Atari Interactive, Inc. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. "Playstation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

A Plead to the Pollsters

words Brandon Justice

> **"You've got this awesome game you wanna sell? Sure, as long as you account for this checklist of 400 prerequisites."**

Now when I think about favorites, I am a fellah that supposes there are really only two kinds: the things you consider your *favorites* and the things that give you a *new type* of favorite. I also tend to think that the folks who really live the shit outta life perpetually attempt to enjoy the former and embrace the latter as often as they're able.

By the same token, I think games follow the same pattern of potential. They can either be an *evolution* of an existing idea, or they can be a *revolution* of thought, theory and poignant practice that completely obliterates your ability to play anything else with the same sort of awe.

That said, I really wonder what will shake out of this year's Holiday release rush.

There's a lot of pretty horses in this year's race, but just like every year before it, this season will see a healthy dose of ups ***and*** downs. Sure, there will be some badass blockbusters, some solid but flawed "horseshoes," some tired clones and a mountain of downright dogs; there always are.

The thing is, until you play them, ya can't be quite certain which one's which. Will Bethesda's open-world apocalyptic epic, *Fallout 3* out-pace *Oblivion* with a satisfying sequel? Can Valve make it 2-for-2 in the indie leg-up lottery with its deliciously progressive co-op zombie zapper, *Left 4 Dead?* Was Spore worth all that hype? Will *Guitar Hero* regain its crown? Can *Gears 2* up the ante even higher?

Call me curious.

That curiosity, in and of itself, is one of the main reasons why games are one of only a handful of things on Christmas morning that still get me giddy like…well… like a kid on Christmas morning, really. Will they be fun? Will they be worth the $60 bucks? Will I get really, really lucky and find something special, or will they all feel sorta "meh"?

That's the big question, isn't it?

I mean, there are a **lot** of games released every year, but it's not often that one comes along that really changes the way people think about games. As a game-maker, these titles make you proud, they give you hope…hell, in a sea of sequels and also-rans, they're just great to see on the market.

Lucky for us, Sony and Media Molecule have already managed to release a title that is on a crash-course towards exactly that type of experience. Yes, in *LittleBigPlanet*, they didn't just build something fun or impressive or good…they've built something important.

Not just because it's an outstanding single-player experience (which it is), or because it's a unique multiplayer experience in the platforming genre (which is also all sorts of true), but more because of what the game's healthily hyped pack-in level editor itself means to the industry and its patrons.

Simply put, there are a lot of "editors" that ship with games. Powerful beasts used in real-world development from the likes of Epic and Valve, and simple world builders that ship with *Tony Hawk* or *Halo 3,* but honestly, nothing comes close to delivering such a powerful, complete, user-friendly tool on the console. Hell, when you consider this thing was designed for the same kids who like cutesy platformers in the first place, I'd say there isn't another game on the market that manages this, period, **including** the mighty Unreal editor.

The reason this is such a LittleBigDeal? Well, let me put it to you this way: Forget for a second that the game is beautiful, charming, playable, and fun. *LBP* teaches you how to do everything you'd need to know to build a functional platformer. You put together the world itself, set event triggers, determine the timing on moving platforms, place audio emitters, design and build vehicles, craft enemy AI patterns, script NPC encounters, and so much more, all with a few quick clicks and a healthy dose of imagination.

That, in and of itself is such a massive accomplishment. Think about it. I got into the games industry with zero understanding of 99.9% of its core concepts. I didn't know a level file from a player profile, and couldn't tell you the first thing about how you make an enemy smart, let alone how to make an enemy smart enough to appear stupid.

Kids who are lucky enough to grow up with *LittleBigPlanet* and the slew of clones in other genres that are sure to follow will have practical experience building as many levels as they care to create, and exposure to countless others. They'll know how to scope and build and tweak and cut like a pro before they can drive a car or get thrown out of a bar, for chissakes. Further, they'll be able to experience it all with friends, collaborating with their fellow creators to learn, grow, and set new high-water marks for user created content with each passing day. They will undoubtedly see games differently… appreciate them on a different level…heck, they may even use this game to make a name for themselves in an effort to make game design a full time gig. Given the undeniably niche nature of game development as a career track in the work wish list of the average wageslave, this may be one of the most important products in the history of our medium.

In a month or two, our industry's informed elite will gather in semi-secret clusters of judgmental joy and eventually proclaim a series of titles as the year's best. They'll make some safe picks, some easy picks, some right picks and some absolute dogs. They'll make up some new awards, some funny, some stupid and some really well done.

But if they don't give this game its due, I'll have to start wondering what it is, exactly, that they are looking to reward. Big budgets, big guns, and big marketing campaigns may rule the TRSTS data, but I hope they recognize a LittleBig game that has the potential to capture the imagination of an entire generation of would-be developers.

Lord knows I do.

Brandon Justice hopes this year's elections weren't a big bummer. Feel free to e-mail your ballot-based banter to bjustice@playhard.net.

"Oh, Venezuela, you silly country! Did you miss 2008? "

The only thing I didn't like about Play's October issue was the amount of unnecessary scorn that was heaped on crates and other storage containers. I know this sounds like a dumb letter, and I feel like an idiot for writing it, but I need this trend to come to a grinding halt before it gets out of control.

It all began when I read the comic at the beginning of the issue, "The Gaming Cliche Spotter Guide." It was all about how stupid and unrealistic it is for things to be stored in crates, and how we as gamers are being spoon-fed the Lie of the Crate. "As if guns and ammunition would ever be stored in crates! That's laughable! Anyone who's anyone knows that the US armed forces carry all their heavy gear around in garbage bags. They're called pockets, people: Try putting your stuff in there." (Those aren't direct quotes, I'm only trying to capture the spirit of the comic.) Now, obviously this was a retarded comic that should never have been published; however, I could write it off because, as a starving artist who has to do hard labor, I kind of like the idea that somewhere in the world, there's a guy with soft hands who gets paid to draw crappy comics and doesn't have to do the horrible, soul-numbing work that I have to do. And that guy can have a "bad month," that's fine. But as a common laborer I have insight into a few things that an office jockey might not. For instance, some goods that have to be moved around actually come in sizes that are larger (and heavier!) than a ream of Office Depot paper. And, you guessed it, those things are often stacked on large pallets OR shipped in heavy crates. I know this story sounds unbelievable, but it gets even crazier. Sometimes so much of said goods have to be moved that they don't all fit in one crate; in this instance, large rooms or entire warehouses might have to be filled with crates, boxes, even pallets. Oil... stored in barrels? And it's all just *lying around*? You better believe it! Those massive oil pipelines that you hear about don't actually stretch all the way to the gas station. And even when the goods get put in crates or drums, they aren't always being moved constantly; sometimes they have to be stored somewhere!

Okay, but back to my point. I would have let the matter drop if it had just been the comic. But then I went on to read the review of Mercenaries 2. And the damn review opens up with the reviewer riffing on the unbelievable nature of goods stored in crates and boxes! Oh, how Greg Orlando shakes his head in scorn at the unrealistic representation of Venezuela as a country that foolishly stores its oil in drums. Oh, Venezuela, you silly country! Did you miss 2008? Don't you know that replicating nanomachines and matter-to-data conversion technology make the storage of hard goods completely unnecessary? I couldn't believe it! Hell, I still don't believe it! When you only dedicate a single page to review a game, are you really going to emulate the mentality of the "cynical roommate who doesn't play videogames but wants to watch you play them"? You know who I'm talking about. You're having the most intense gaming session of your life when all of a sudden this bored (and boring) dumbass walks in, plops down, sighs loudly, and then scornfully comments on how every little detail just doesn't jive with their narrow world-view. If they ramble on about how Solid Snake should be dead because he got shot, then you fantasize about blasting their kneecaps off to show them how it's possible to linger on in agony for hours. And if they make wry comments about crates which are foolishly packed with goods, it's all you can do to control yourself and not stuff that person in a body-bag for freezer storage.

We all know that person. He's not cool; he sucks. So why would anyone want to BE that person? Why not be the guy who gives me the inside scoop on a new videogame? Why not be the guy who helps me think that joy and hope are just around the corner?

But I'm not picking on Greg Orlando. Sure, he's on my Shit List right now, but for one thing I'll get over it, and for another thing - all you motherfu**ers pull that shit sometimes! Just remember that when a joke wants to be made, it will present itself to you like a crate full of wondrous items. You don't have to force it. Cause if you do force it, then some common laborer like me has to come along and embarrass everybody by pointing out the shit that ACTUALLY DOESN'T make sense.

From Hell,

Kyle B.

SPLIT REASON
CLOTHING COMPANY
GET 10% OFF
Enter promo terminated at check out
GEAR FOR GEEKS AND GAMERS
WWW.SPLITREASON.COM
get a life
grow up
Particle physics gives me a hadron
Skynet
DEVELOPMENT TEAM

NPD GROUP

DATABASE

DECEMBER **2008**

Number of Hardware Units Sold: September 2008

01	PlayStation 2	173.5K
02	PlayStation 3	232.4K
03	PSP	238.1K
04	Xbox 360	347.2K
05	Wii	687.0K

PLAYSTATION 3

Top 10 Video Games Sold: September 2008

01	STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED	LUCASARTS	360	610K
02	WII FIT W/ BALANCE BOARD	NINTENDO OF AMERICA	Wii	518K
03	ROCK BAND 2	MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS	360	363K
04	MARIO KART W/ WHEEL	NINTENDO OF AMERICA	Wii	353K
05	STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED	LUCASARTS	PS3	325K
06	MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES	ELECTRONIC ARTS	360	297K
07	WII PLAY W/ REMOTE	NINTENDO OF AMERICA	Wii	243K
08	MADDEN NFL 09	ELECTRONIC ARTS	360	224K
09	STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED	LUCASARTS	Wii	223K
10	MADDEN NFL 09	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PS2	158K

PSYCH
ign.com
BEST OF E3
2008
WINNER
MOTORSTORM™
PACIFIC RIFT

16 INSANE ISLAND COURSES

OVER 100 DIFFERENT OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

ONLINE AND OFFLINE MULTIPLAYER

FOR MORE INSANITY, VISIT MOTORSTORM.COM

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Mild Violence

ONLY ON

PLAYSTATION® 3

PLAYSTATION®Network

MotorStorm is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Evolution Studios Ltd. "PlayStation," "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

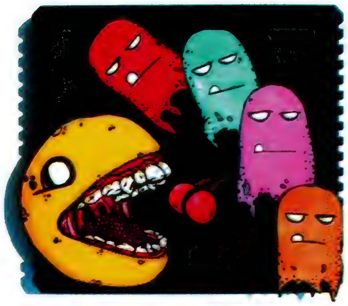
Gaming Culture

words Evan Shamoon

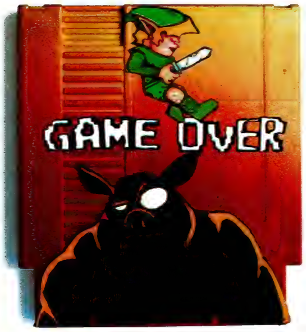
CART ART

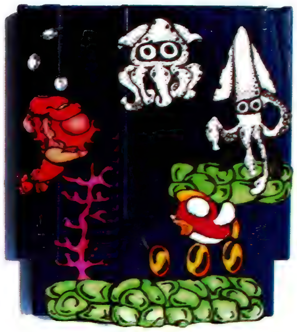
Drawing inspiration from the software (read: games) and actually drawing *on* the hardware of his youth, Cincinnati-based artist Slip creates wild videogame works of art. Using various materials, he constructs lavish scenes from games using old NES cartridges as his plastic, gray canvas.

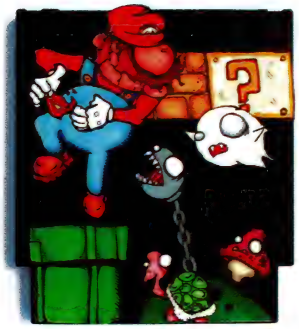
After spray-painting a cart, Slip sketches his idea out onto a Bristol board, cutting out the images and layering various pieces of the artwork on top. He's gone as high as having ten different layers atop a single cart. The choice for theses creative vessels usually leans towards older, more obscure, and inevitably more "crap" titles (think: Bible Adventures), due in large part to the fact that these games are cheaper to buy used.

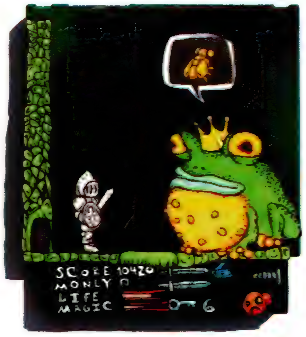


As to why his characters lack any discernible pupils in their eyeballs? "This is a question I get all the time," Slip told website The Minus World. "The reasoning for pupil-less eyes is that it gives my creations a god-like sense of immortality. I give pupils to those who portray human characteristics. I went pupil-less back in the 90's. It was the first step in the development of my style." Order or commission your own Cart Art at hushmonkeystudios.com.









CONSOLE MODS

While it's tough argue that the PlayStation3 is a particularly good-looking console (I like the George Foreman Grill analogy best, ourselves), some recent PS3 efforts out of the hardware modding scene deserve mention.

The first comes in tribute to Metal Gear Solid 4, and is tricked out with 15 LEDs, which provide backlight for the raised MGS4 logo and its giant laser etching of Old Snake. It's also signed by MGS director Hideo Kojima and Raging Raven voice actor Yumi Kikuchi, comes with a custom carrying case and custom controller, features a swell Foxhound badge in place of the PS logo. Oh, and it comes with the following: a GA-KO Alarm Clock, The Complete Four Bottle Set of Revive 24 energy drive with all Four Limited MGS4 Items (imported from Japan), Metal Gear Solid 4 Special Edition T-Shirt, Custom Embroidered Otacon Patch, Custom Made Fox Hound Vinyl Decal, Hardcover Limited Edition MGS4 Strategy Guide with Solid Snake Lithograph, World Tour - Launch Day Dog Tags, and a custom made full size Fox Hound Hardcase for the PS3 and Accessories. It's going on eBay for $16,800 (and counting—still four days left!), which makes this beast officially cost more than your car.

NEW
METAL GEAR SOLID
MEGASTORE
METAL GEAR SOLID

From robots to rhinos: the second of these custom lovelies comes from German *über-modder* Oliver "Butterkneter" König, who teamed up with Ubisoft to create not only a war-torn case, but also an insanely detailed base for the console—complete with rocks, plants, an empty magazine, a skull, and a frighteningly large ant. He then removed the console's case and went to town on it with a dremel tool (think: dentist's drill), and finally painted it. Bit-tech has bestowed the piece upon a lucky contest winner, but check out the site for more pictures (of the entire process, in fact). http://www.bit-tech.net

THERE IS NO SPEED, NO REFLEX, NO TWITCH,
THAT CAN SAVE YOU FROM MY MIND
HERE I RULE
MAGIC
The Gathering®
HERE I RULE.COM

All trademarks are property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ©2008 Wizards.

Touch It

Better every time

words Evan Shamoon

As most new iPhone owners are quickly realizing, there's an absolute glut of games available on the App Store—1484 (!!), in fact, by our last count. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of these games are either one-trick ponies or total junk. There are, of course, some exceptions: Imangi, PapiJump+, MazeFinger, Sol Free, Galcon, Enigmo, Star Trigon, and WordSquares are all high-quality affairs. In other words, the puzzle genre is already very well represented, and will undoubtedly continue to be. But what about other types of games, meant for those who would rather play a blindfolded game of Chicken on the Autobahn than anything involving the manipulation of anything resembling a word or a block? Not much.

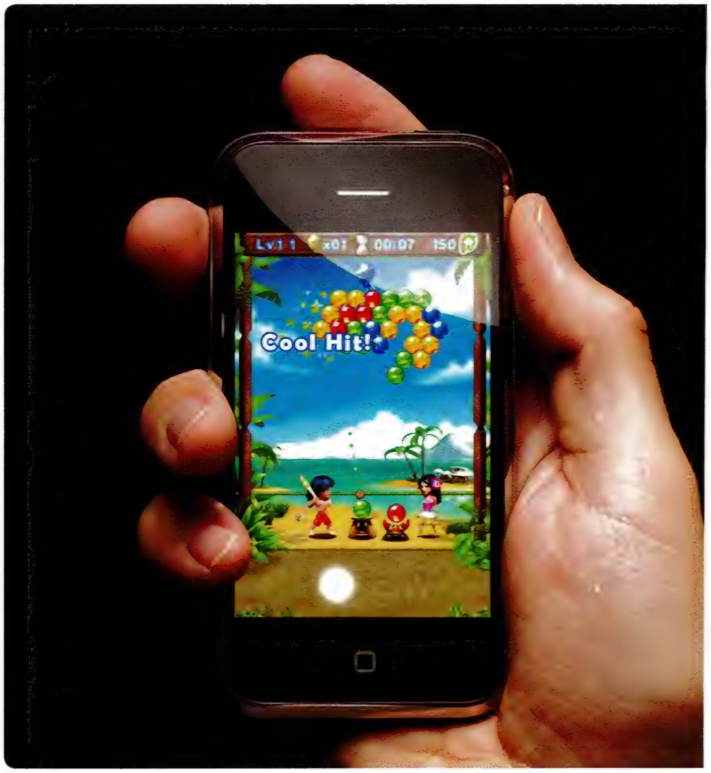
Which leads us to our next point: What's arguably more intriguing than the games currently available is the machine's potential. Under the hood is some surprisingly robust hardware. A comparison with Sony's PSP is pretty eye-opening: the iPhone has a faster processer (412 Mhz vs. 333 Mhz), loads more ram (128 MB vs. 32 MB), and even a slightly higher screen resolution. Meaning, in short, that's it's capable of running 2D and 3D games at least comparable to (if not better than) what we've seen on PSP.

But then there's one thing can't be overlooked—and it's a big one. The iPhone doesn't have any buttons (and no, we're not including the indented one). Playing action games generally requires quick hardware response, and nobody has really figured out how to get around that—pushing virtual "touch" buttons lacks the tactility of the real thing. While they certainly do lend themselves to (sometimes steep) learning curves, gesture-based movements would appear to be the most logical way forward. With the new MacBooks, Apple has integrated this concept into its trackpad: there is now a gesture-based system for interacting with your computer, getting around windows, in and out of applications, and through your many gigabytes of media. Why couldn't this concept be applied to getting around zombies, marching closer to the endzone, or making virtual music? It will require learning, certainly, but so did learning how to use an analog stick.

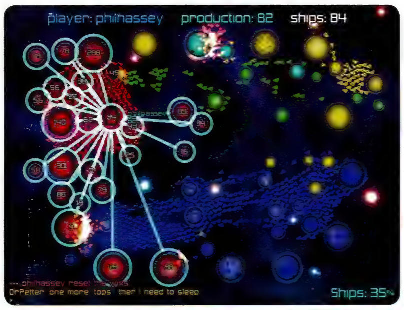
Of course, the iPhone wasn't designed as a gaming device (the way, say, the Nintendo DS was), and the fact that nobody has figured out a workable solution yet is a bit troubling. So, there's a less progressive (and decidedly less convenient) way forward as well: namely, an add-on piece of hardware that would connect via either USB or Bluetooth. Of course, the only way to assure support would be for Apple to produce it—and frankly, given the company's history in regard to games, that will never happen. But it doesn't mean others won't try: iControlPad (http://www.icontrolpad.com/) appears to be the farthest along (treading in some pseudo-legal territory, we might add), and others are sure to follow.

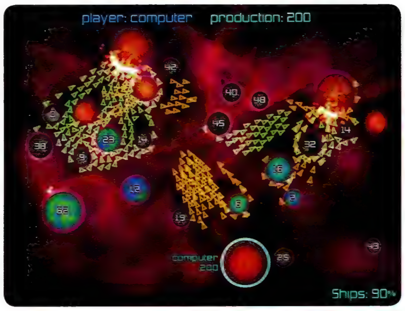
Is this the way forward? No, but it might be a great way backward—the ability to play anything in your library of classic emulated games would be welcome. We just hope someone comes up with a better solution. If we had one, of course, we'd have created the Street Fighter II of iPhone games and would ideally sipping Mai Tais in Tahiti by now.

> "What's arguably more intriguing than the games currently available is the machine's potential."

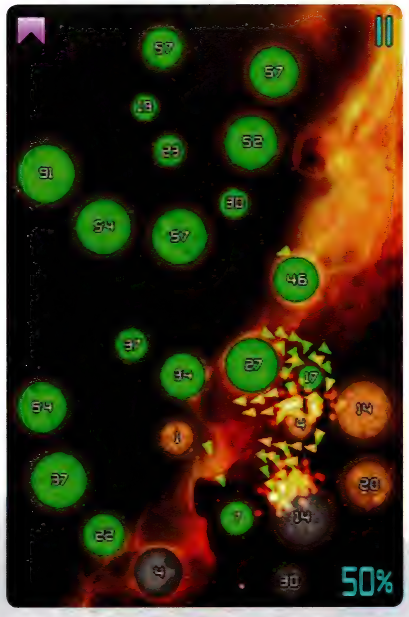


Hey look, Bust-a-mo...er, Bubble Bash





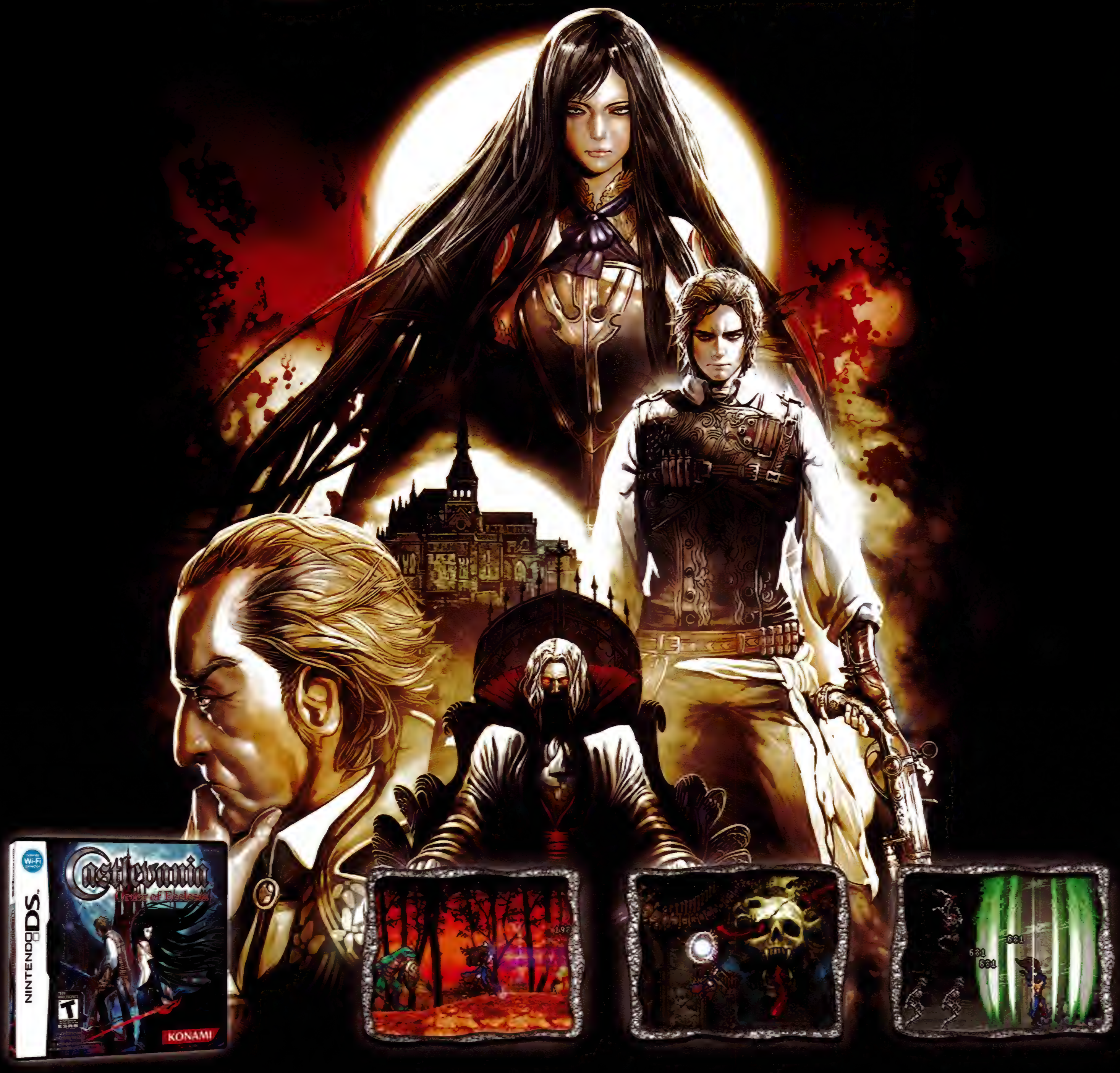
STAGE
1-2
SCORE



O2-UK
11:11
Bio
Darth Vader
Done

Insert witty joke about the G1 striking down the iPhone here.

Castlevania
Order of Ecclesia


Castlevania
Order of Ecclesia
NINTENDO DS
KONAMI
Wi-Fi
198
681
681
681

AVAILABLE NOW!

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Fantasy Violence
Online Interactions Not Rated by The ESRB

© 2008 Konami Digital Entertainment. KONAMI is a registered trademark of KONAMI CORPORATION. The rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. Nintendo DS is a trademark of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo

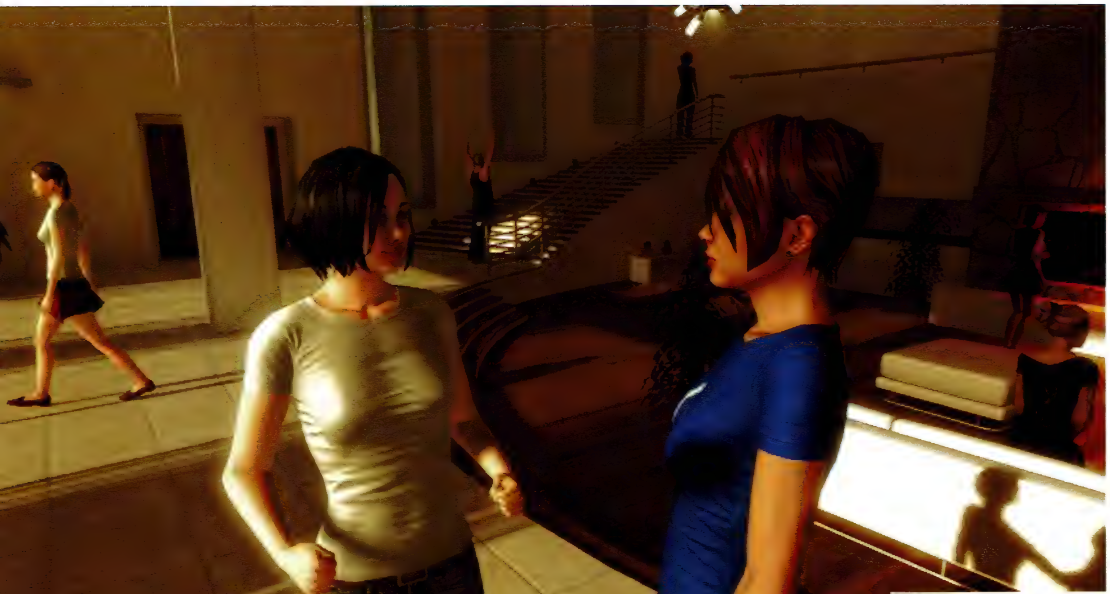
NINTENDO DS™

KONAMI
www.konami.com

Playstation Home

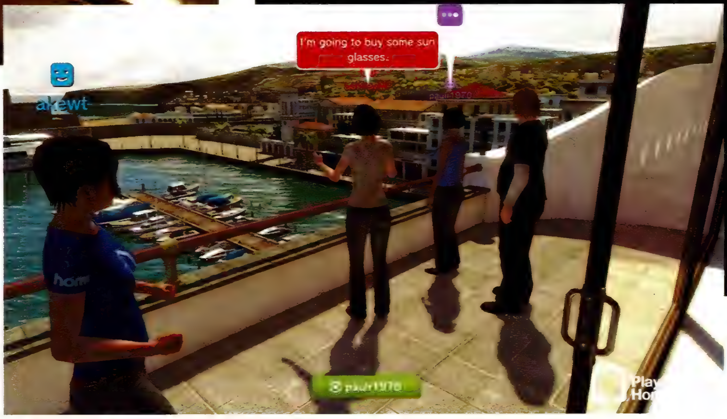
There's no place like it.

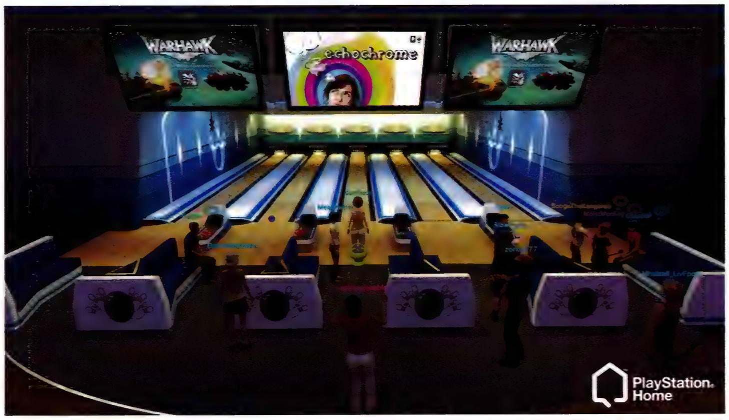
words Heather Campbell



PlayStation Home

> "...think of Home as an avatar-driven Matchmaking session ...with elements of Facebook."





PlayStation Home is swiftly becoming the Duke Nukem Forever of console apps. With no release date in sight, the PlayStation social network that is one part Second Life, one part Snow Crash's Metaverse (with a glossy corporate finish reminiscent of The Sims), Home is one of those Big Name Products we're all familiar with ... despite the fact that few of us have actually experienced it firsthand.

Described as a "3-D Social Gaming Community," by Home director Jack Buser, the environment is a place to "enhance the gaming experience." "[Gamers] can talk about their favorite games, and they can launch into their favorite games directly from Home." Meaning if players want to get a group together to play Warhawk, they can select the attributes of their match from within Home, launch the game and bypass all of the menus and selection screens of the title proper.

For those familiar with Halo 3 on Xbox Live, think of Home as an avatar-driven Matchmaking session ... with elements of Facebook.

"We either make friends in the real world, you know: 'I already know you, we're already friends, we already own a PS3 and we add each other to our friends' list, and boom, we're done.' Or number two: We're playing a game and I shoot you down and say, 'Oh, that was cool, I shot you down,' and I add you to my friends list," says Buser. "Oftentimes, what happens is that when you meet a person in that context, you realize you didn't really know that person before you added them to your friends list.

"Home gives you the ability to get to know someone before you add them to your friends list. It's more like what happens in the real world."

Meeting gamers in the real world? That's never happened to me.

"Why not?" asks Buser. Then he answers his own question: "Because there's nowhere for gamers to go." As Buser describes it, Home is not a game, but rather a platform. What individual game companies do to enhance their brands is up to them -- but Home's strength is its ability to evolve constantly.

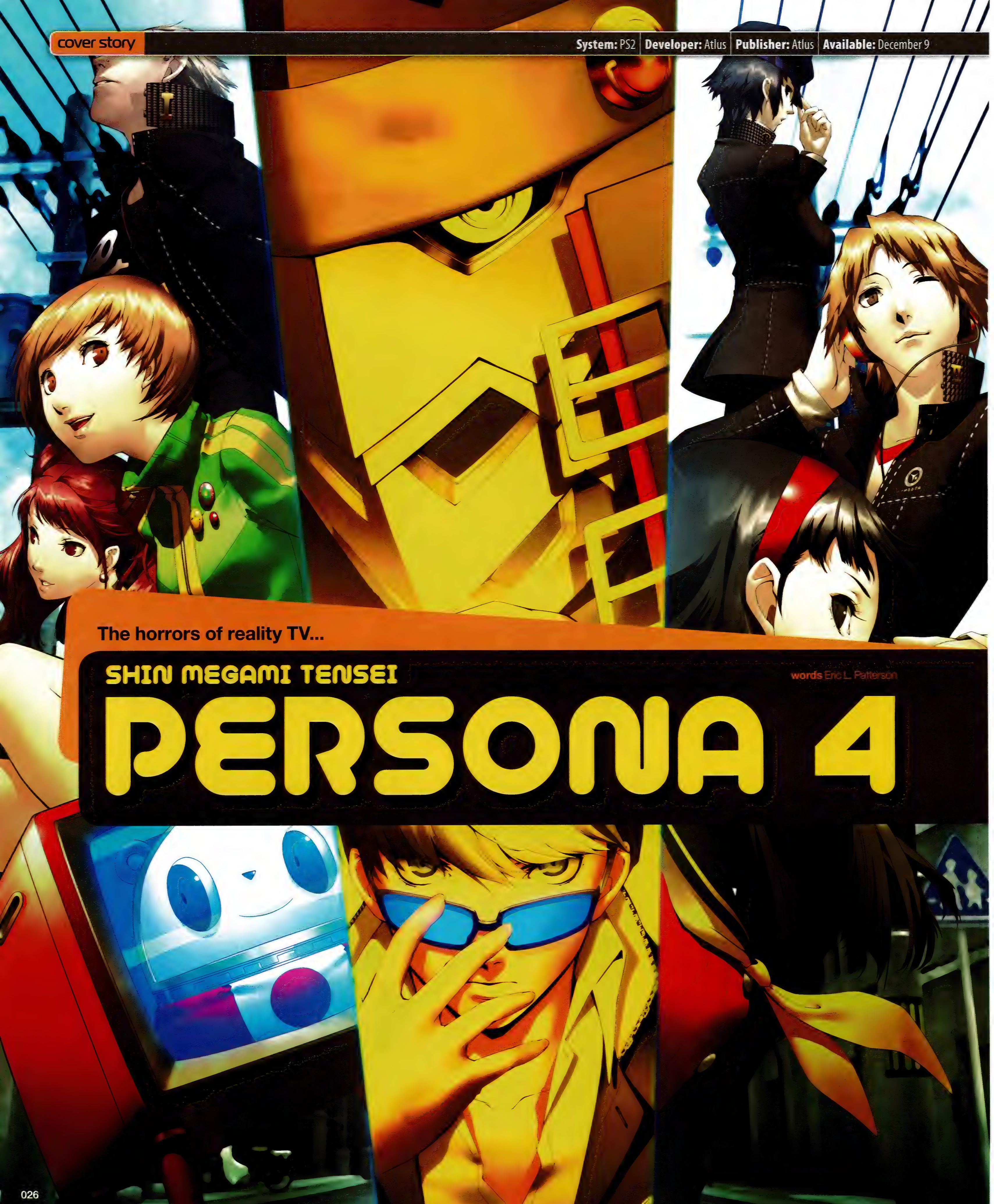
"What you see a month before launch is going to be very different from what happens the month of launch," he smiles.

The only question is: When is it going to launch?

The Time For Judgment Has Come!
Available This Winter
Wii
Castlevania Judgment
KONAMI
Castlevania Judgment
Wii
KONAMI
www.konami.com
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Suggestive Themes
Violence
Online Interactions Not Rated by The ESRB

© 2008 Konami Digital Entertainment KONAMI is a registered trademark of KONAMI CORPORATION. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. Wii and Wii logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo.

System: PS2 | **Developer:** Atlus | **Publisher:** Atlus | **Available:** December 9



The horrors of reality TV...

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

PERSONA 4

words Eric L. Patterson

Each character is a tragic hero, and yet, they are at their core nothing more than ordinary people thrown into extraordinary situations. Because of this, we can relate to them, progress with them, live the adventure that is Persona through them.

Eleven years ago, I wrote those words as part of the opening to the official GameFan strategy guide for a quirky new RPG brought to the United States by Atlus called Revelations: Persona. It is funny that they would then end up being at their most relevant nearly a decade later at the release of the franchise's third official chapter, Persona 3.

Persona 3 was the game that changed things for me. Truth be told, I hadn't been so happy with the Japanese RPG genre over recent years; a genre I came to love from the 8-bit days of Phantasy Star and Dragon Warrior, and a genre I watched fall into stagnation as generations passed but most new titles did little to progress themselves over their forefathers. P3 may not have been the phoenix rising from the ashes of outdated ideas and cliches that I longed to see, but it was the game to stand up and challenge me to look at things in a whole new perspective, just as the original Persona had done so long ago.

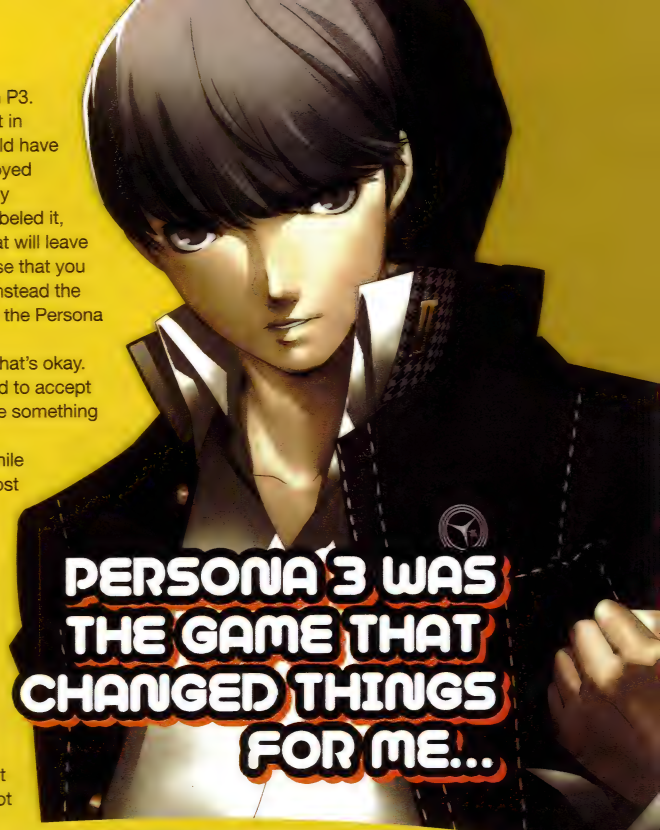
And it was this love for the game that gave me back my faith that made me wonder if I had made a horrible mistake in pushing so hard to have Persona 4 be our cover story for this month.

The first person in Persona 4 to officially join our protagonist in his adventures is a young lad by the name of Yosuke. Like you, Yosuke is originally from the big city, brought to the sleepy Japanese town of Inaba due to his father's managerial position at the recently-opened mega store Junes. (Junes is the Wal-mart of the gaming world: the "evil" big-box retailer who comes in with little concern for the fate of the local market.) Yosuke's awakening to the power of Persona–those inner selves of ours that give us strength beyond what we normally can achieve–doesn't come as it has come before, which typically amounts to a trumpet of fanfare and a "hey kid, here's your Persona, now go save the world" for good measure. Instead, it comes in a scene where Yosuke is forced to not only face those feelings and emotions he has kept bottled up inside of him, but fight that inner self after initially refusing to acknowledge that other self as his own. This would be the way all of the main characters in P4 (save the protagonist) would be awarded their power, and it's a powerful and meaningful change that ends up setting the stage for where the game intends to take you.

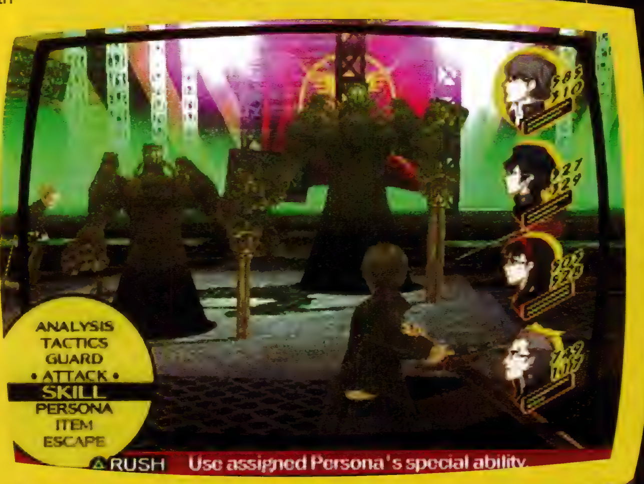
I mention this facet of Persona 4 here now because it is key to what I myself had to come to understand, and what those out there who were fans of Persona 3 will have to face in themselves. As excited and enthusiastic as I was going in, an hour or so into P4, I wasn't enjoying it, and that's because the true feeling I had buried in my heart that I refused to accept was that I didn't want to like it better than P3. Had this been a completely new project, different in detail and design from its previous chapter, I could have left those feelings for P3 where they lay, and enjoyed P4 without any of that comparison going on in my mind. The truth is, P4 is indeed, as some have labeled it, "Persona 3.5". It is not a revolutionary project that will leave you with the same feelings of wonder and surprise that you felt with P3 (unless you haven't played P3); it is instead the progression of what was started in that rebirth of the Persona series, and what was built upon in FES.

I had loved Persona 3, and I always will, and that's okay. At some point, though, I had to let it go, and I had to accept Persona 4 for what it was without wanting it to be something it wasn't.

What I can now say with confidence is that while Persona 4 may be a better technical game (in most respects) than Persona 3, what is far more important is that it is a better *experience*. While there are many reasons for this, the absolute biggest contributor is the strength of the cast we have been given here, a strength nowhere displayed as brilliantly as it is in Chie Satonaka. Chie is quite possibly one of the best characters ever to come from Atlus, Megami Tensei series or otherwise, and if she doesn't go on to become a fan favorite in the category of female RPG characters, it will be proof that there is no justice in this world. From the moment I met her, I fell in love with Chie as a character–not because the game was trying with all of its might to convince me that I liked her, as P3 struggled to do with Yukari, but because she simply works so amazingly well. She is, at her core, nothing more than your average girl, a person that you could actually bump into one day while browsing VHS tapes of kung-fu movies recorded from Chinese TV on the shelf of some poorly-lit Asian video store somewhere. Chie has no tragic flaw waiting to show itself, no dark secret past soon to surface; she is just a girl who can be strong, but is never invincible; who can be weak, but is never breakable;



PERSONA 3 WAS THE GAME THAT CHANGED THINGS FOR ME...



A small taste of P4's improved battle interface.

09/ 7 S
Aft r Scl
Secret Laboratory B8F

The Protagonist

The protagonist, aka you. After coming to the town of Inaba to live with your uncle and his young daughter for a year, what seemed like a chance for some peace and quiet in rural Japan ends up a battle of life-or-death as a rash of mysterious murders begin to occur. While investigating the crimes with your new friend Yosuke, you awaken to the power of persona, the only thing with the ability to return Inaba to normalcy.

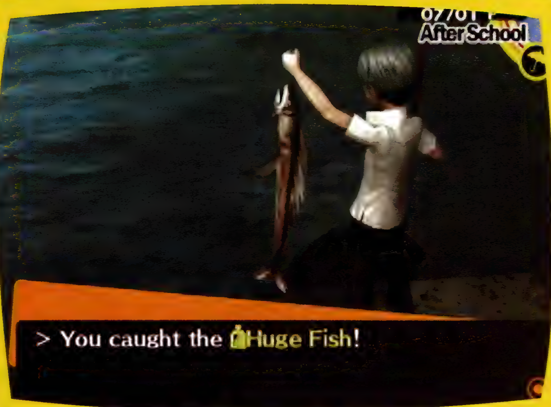
who can be a dork, but is never dumb. When it came time to decide which I wanted to pursue her as–either a love interest or a close friend, a new option you're given in P4 for the major female characters, instead of just automatically trying to get your groove on with all of them–I chose to forego love, because I had so grown to respect her as a comrade and a friend, and didn't want to cheapen that by feeling forced to switch her over to romance status. (Well, that, and my eye was instead on a certain red-haired ex-idol.)

What Persona 4 does in Chie, and in the entire rest of the cast, is allow the characters to simply be, for lack of a better word, "normal." P3's cast, as much as I loved them, each held in themselves classic stereotypes from the world of Japanese gaming and anime: the goofy slacker, the mature older rich girl, the cool upperclassman all the students admire, the shy, frail girl who has trouble fitting in. Those characters, throughout the course of P3, had to be given opportunities to show that there was depth to them beyond those cookie-cutter positions. The people you'll come to know in P4 aren't tragic heroes pushed into a situation they never wanted to be in, they're down to earth high schoolers who are eager to use their powers to save those around them, yet who are also perfectly capable of forgetting their troubles when the opportunity to have fun arises. In stripping away that desperation of having the entire world balancing on their shoulders, these heroes and heroines have become far more relatable, and in turn, also more endearing.

It's nice, then, to see that one of the changes made to Persona's current claim to fame, the Social Link system, is an increased importance on those closest to you. As before, your best female friends are more than eager to grow their relationships with you, but now so too are your male teammates. This initially makes the overall head count when it comes to Social Links feel artificially smaller, because a decent chunk of your possible acquaintances are already accounted for. What you find, however, is that your Social Links now have more emotional value to them, and while you'll be spending more time with your close circle of friends because of the benefits they'll gain in combat (which we'll get to in a moment), you'll also do so because those are the people you most *want* to spend time with. Though a few aspects of the overall social experience don't quite feel as robust as or improved upon those that were in Persona 3 as they should–Sunday outings with friends don't feel as spontaneous, and events like the summer festival or school cultural event are still woefully under-developed–there are a greater amount of elements that have either been nicely expanded or are completely new. Stat-boosting situations can now improve your standing with multiple characters at once, and a wide variety of jobs and side tasks now exists when you've got some time on your hands and nothing to do otherwise.

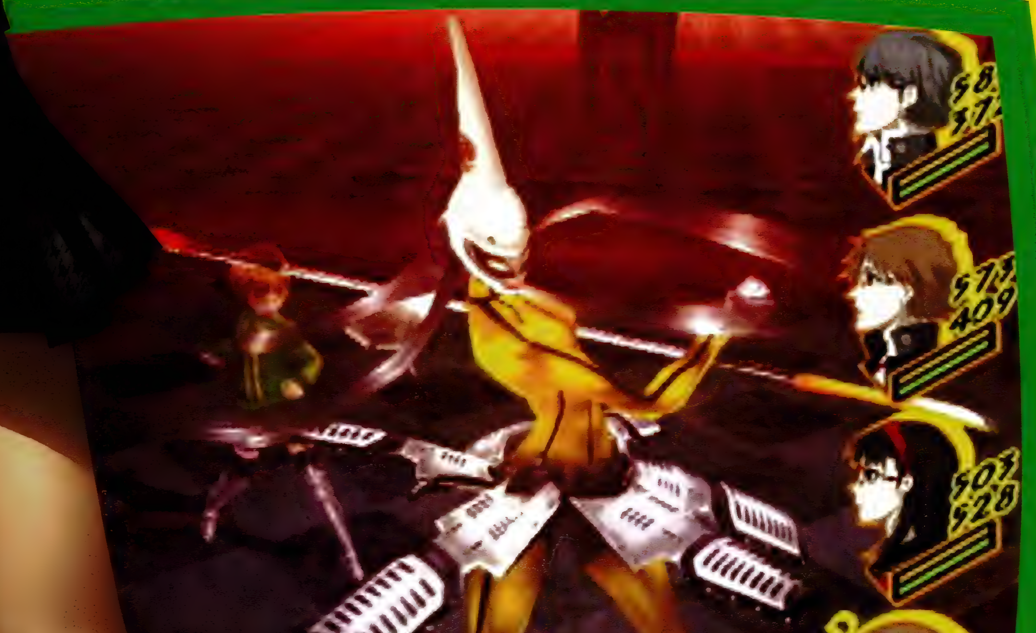
The changes made to Persona 4's social side are by far the biggest differences you'll find when compared to Persona 3, but they certainly aren't the only ones. Tartarus–the 250+ floor dungeon that served as the setting for most of P3's combat-related gameplay–was somewhat of a sticking point for some. P4 goes away from the idea of an all-encompassing location, and instead gives players smaller, much more personalized dungeons based around the personality of the character you're trying to save at that point. (An idea crafted to brilliance in the game's fourth dungeon.) Coming from the monstrous Tartarus, at first these locations will feel positively tiny, but the change in attitude and atmosphere they create is unquestionably positive. Those who enjoyed the dungeon crawling of P3 should still find enough here to be satisfied, but those who found that aspect a chore will no doubt be happy to see their source of exhaustion changed into a more manageable experience.

Much bigger of a shock, surprisingly, was what you'll find new this time around once you've actually encountered a Shadow in said dungeons. Little tweaks to the core elements of battle mean that some previous strategies no longer exist, and the addition of new skills that your teammates can unlock as you progress their Social Links–such as pushing your character out of the way of a mortal blow, or curing



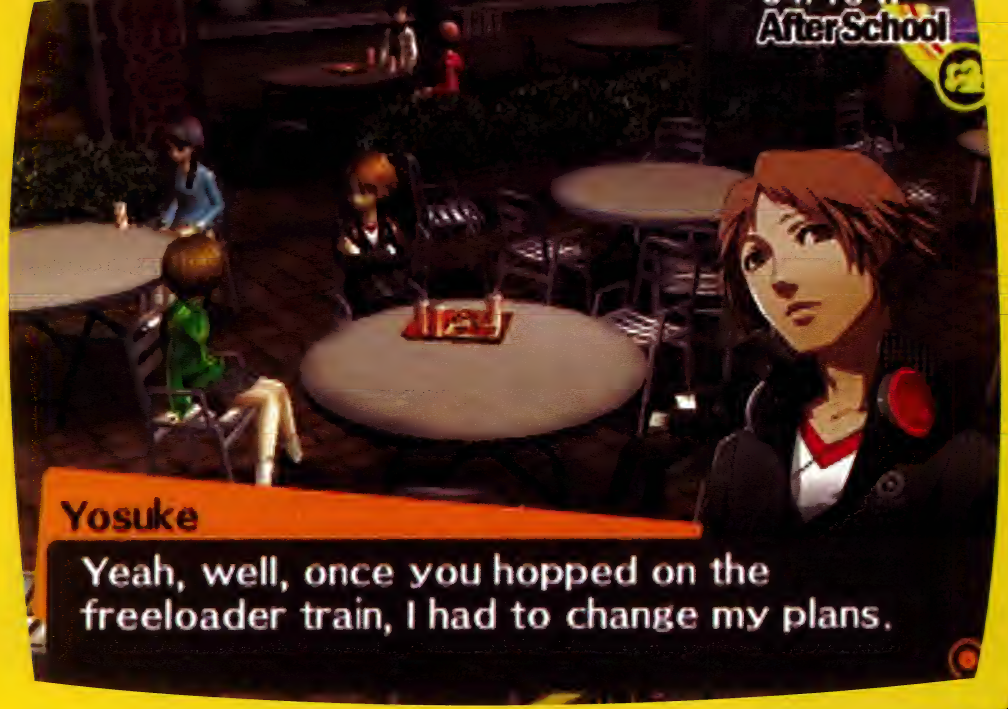
> You caught the Huge Fish!

Hmm, what to do today:
Save somebody's life, or go fishing.



Chie Satonaka

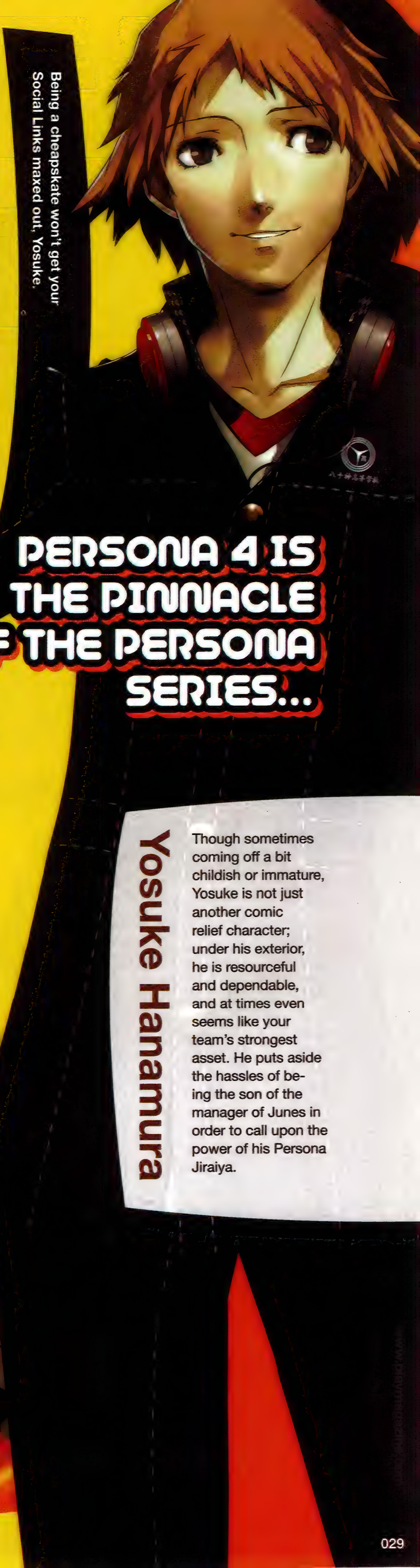
Cute, sassy, fun-loving, yet a fierce and formidable foe when duty calls, Chie serves as one of the game's top heroines, equaling the power and determination of any of her male counterparts. Chie mixes her love of kung-fu movies and her sworn duty to protect her friend Yukiko to give her the strength she needs on the battlefield to call upon her Persona Tomoe.



Yosuke

Yeah, well, once you hopped on the freeloader train, I had to change my plans.

Being a cheapskate won't get your Social Links maxed out, Yosuke.



another character of a status ailment for free after a knock-down attack–provide an interesting extra layer not only to battle, but the overall feeling of a team working together in itself. And, speaking of teamwork, we get to that bullet-point that rests near the top of any list detailing the changes in Persona 4: the ability to directly control your party members should you decide to. I am, I must say, a tad conflicted on this one. Some folks out there do not at all like the notion of A.I.-controlled characters in RPGs, and will be happy to know that they can now have full say at all times over their party in P4. As somebody who very much supports the A.I. teammate route, people like me will find the results mixed: your party members are wonderfully smarter than they were before, but the amount of specific strategies you can have a character follow has been reduced. No doubt the thought was that more specific control should now come from, well, direct control. While not a deal breaker, those like myself who would prefer to not fall back on the direct control crutch will find it near impossible to avoid that temptation in a few of the boss battles.

There is, unfortunately, one point of serious concern with Persona 4, and it is something that I, in my infinite wisdom, predicted back in my review for Persona 3:

If Persona 3 has one major flaw, it is the point at which the harsh realization sets in that this game is too ambitious for its own good... As heartbroken as I may be, I can't blame Persona 3 for not being more than it set out to be, because it took a lot of chances and really pulled off everything it attempted. Instead, I blame the game for now making me want a Persona 4 that would probably be financially (and logistically) impossible for Atlus to produce.

Persona 4 is absolutely, unquestionably an amazing game. When nostalgia is put aside and it is compared to Persona 3, P4 is truly the better offering, and taking into account that I consider P3 to be one of the top PS2 titles ever to see release, that's saying something. And yet, even as much as I came to embrace P4 once I opened my heart to it, I just couldn't help but feel like I wasn't fully satisfied. With P3, I expected nothing, and ended up with more than I could have imagined. With P4, I knew what I wanted, and when the meal was finished, I was left hungry. What has been crafted here is quality from beginning to end, but there can–no, must–be more. The player's interaction with the characters must be richer, as too must the situations we are presented. I don't want to watch the virtual me having fun at a class outing via a few lines of text, I want to have that fun myself. I don't want to wait for pre-set days in order to deepen my relationships with others, I want to use the cell phone my character always has at hand to call them up and invite them out. I want my character to find love that actually results in a relationship, or at least something other than a blushing character pic and a few slightly different final events. (I'd also, by the way, like to help those teammates who aren't part of such dating situation find love themselves.)

Persona 4 is the pinnacle of the Persona series, a journey of 11+ years that has come so far and now shines so bright. For a series that has become so focused on the development of relationships, however, it itself must now develop in what it provides us from those relationships. Otherwise, as good as Persona 4 may be, I fear for the stagnation a Persona 5 could easily fall into.

P.S. - Atlus, I love you for Persona 4's Square button. (Readers, you'll understand when you play.) But seriously–we need to talk about long, drawn out story sequences before boss battles that cannot in any way be skipped other than mashing a button. When I'm heading in for my fifth attempt at a boss, I really don't need to see them again.

parting shot

Your affection... your affection... OH GOD GET IT OUT OF MY HEAD!!!

PERSONA 4 IS THE PINNACLE OF THE PERSONA SERIES...

Yosuke Hanamura

Though sometimes coming off a bit childish or immature, Yosuke is not just another comic relief character; under his exterior, he is resourceful and dependable, and at times even seems like your team's strongest asset. He puts aside the hassles of being the son of the manager of Junes in order to call upon the power of his Persona Jiraiya.

Yosuke Strike
!!

Interview Questions
by Dai Kohama and
Eric L. Patterson

Interview #1

Katsura Hashino

Director / Producer, Persona 4

play: What is your earliest memory of the Megami Tensei series?
Katsura Hashino: The first title I worked on after I joined Atlus was "Shin Megami Tensei: if..." where I was put in charge of the Guardian system. Now that I think about it, that Guardian system became the basis of the Persona series, so I've been involved with the series since then. Wow, that's a long time.

Persona was originally conceived as a light and easy game to introduce players to the MegaTen series. What has changed from that original concept, and what has stayed the same?
When "Shin Megami Tensei: if..." came out, its school setting was well received. So we decided to start a new series that dealt with the inner struggles of young adults, which became Revelations: Persona. Since we actively try to incorporate the latest trends into the Persona series, each title has a distinct feel. However, they all share the fundamental focus of "the human soul."

07/10
Daytime
Rank up!!
Rank 6
0
Fool • Investigation Tean

Can you tell us when Persona 4 development began? Was the decision to develop on PS2 made before or after Persona 3 was released and became so successful?
There were ideas thrown around earlier, but we didn't assemble the team or begin development until after Persona 3's release.

Did you learn any lessons on P3 that made P4 development easier?
Yes. First and foremost, the players' comments and feedback on P3 and FES that we collected were of great help. And the knowledge we gained from the development of P3 allowed us to spend more time in raising the quality of P4. P3 was also the first title in which I was heavily involved with writing the scenario, so that experience helped me a lot when I worked on P4's scenario.

In moving to P4, what elements did you most want to focus on as far as expanding or improving upon what existed in P3?
We wanted to improve P3's system—speeding up the story progression, and enhancing the gameplay. In addition, we wanted to make sure P4 wasn't seen as a retread of P3. To accomplish that, we tried to give the players of P4 a definite goal and a sense of purpose that would keep motivating them as they played through the game. The murder mystery plot was our way of doing that.

05/19
After School

worry! This fog won't clear

What inspirations did you have for the mystery theme?
There were certain things that provided inspiration, but if I told you what they were, that would be a big spoiler. So I should keep my mouth shut. (laughs)

When designing a heavily character-driven game like Persona, which comes first: Characters or story?
The game's theme and scenario come first. No matter what kind of game it is, you can't make it in any other fashion.

How did P4's switch to a small-town setting influence game design, characters, and/or story?
I think the setting influenced all aspects of the game deeply. We also chose this setting to have a positive effect on the game's visuals. A group of youths grow as they try to solve an incident that occurs in a small, rural town—that's the basis or the framework, and from there we added P4's theme of "how individuals process information," and built the rest of the game.

In regards to setting, P4 differs from many other RPGs, where you have a huge world to explore and a wide array of towns instead of one. And yet, since we spent more time in P4's town, we come to know it better and have more attachment to it. How do you feel the difference in scope with P4 helped the game, and were there any ways in which it limited the overall vision?
Since the location was the same throughout the game, the cost of creating the environment was lower than the standard in RPG development, allowing us to expand other portions of the game. And staying in the same location is the perfect way to allow the players to sympathize with the daily life that passes in the game. I'm sure many of these players live their lives peacefully, without any drastic changes happening to them. Having said that, if the environment remained the same, you would need plans and goals, or else the days would become dull quickly. Therefore, we decided that there were a minimum number of events and story progressions we had to exceed to keep the game exciting, and that's where the development cost reached staggering proportions.

Before its North America release, some fans were concerned that P3 may be criticized due to the use of the gun-like invokers for Persona summoning in the game. Did concerns like these in any way cause P4's different Persona-summoning method?
No, we decided on the summoning method based solely on the story's theme. We believe that we can come up with more interesting ideas by not overreacting to public response.

The changes made to the schedule system in P4 almost feel as if they may have been influenced by Western RPGs and simulation games. Is the team actually influenced by those games or is it just a coincidence?
I think it's all a coincidence. (laughs) I do like Western games, though, so maybe they do affect me subconsciously.

How far do you think the Social Link system could be taken? Obviously there needs to continue to be a fine balance between the "RPG" and "Life" aspects of a game like Persona, but do you think the overall idea could support an even deeper social aspect?
I think so. The concept of Social Links is that the world consists of many small worlds that are close to each other and every one of us, and if the manifestation of one's heart is the Persona, then the Social Link is the connection between those hearts. That is what's important,

Yukiko Amagi

Daughter of the family who runs Inaba's famous Amagi Inn, Yukiko comes off as a refined and dignified girl, but in actuality can at times be even sillier and socially awkward than her best friend Chie. Summoning her Persona Konohana Sakuya, Yukiko is indispensable when it comes to healing and support.

and you don't need to adhere to its current form, as portrayed in the game. I myself am very interested in seeing how the Social Link system can develop from here.

Speaking of the depth of the Social Link system, in the past we've seen concepts of playable male and female main protagonists, and the idea of how the Social Links would differ depending on the sex of your characters could be quite interesting. (For example, a character that may be a best friend for the male protagonist could be a boyfriend for the female.) Is it possible that we'll ever see such an option, or at the very least the return to having a female protagonist as we had for Persona 2: Eternal Punishment?
We would need to cut development costs elsewhere in order to include the ability to choose the protagonist's sex, so we'd have to be very careful. But that's something we often hear from the Japanese players too, so it's definitely on our minds.

How, overall, do you think the Social Link system has impacted the Persona series? It was an interesting and fresh idea to bring to the game, but there must be the concern that using the idea too many times may cause it to lose that feeling of uniqueness. On the other hand, now that P3 and P4 have become so popular, fans of the series may end up being hugely disappointed if a future title completely removes that aspect.
I believe the concept of Social Links is one of the key factors in building the world of Persona, and we put a lot of thought and effort into it. However, if this concept were to expand in the future, I think many of the fans will accept it no matter how different it may seem to be from the previous version, as long as the underlying meaning is the same.

The inability to directly control your party members in P3 simulated the feeling of exploring the game with friends very well, but in P4, the ability to directly control your teammates was added back in. While it's still possible to set them on A.I., not taking advantage of the option to control them directly feels almost like a deliberate handicap. How did you and the development team feel about making this change, and do you prefer playing on A.I. settings or with direct control?
I think it's more fun to have the party members controlled by their A.I., so each member's characteristics and personality are on vivid display. There were no objections raised among the P3 development team, either. It's a completely different story, though, if the A.I. routines used in the game are limited; it wasn't well received by many of the P3 players. We were on the A.I.-crafting side, so I guess our tolerance level was higher than that of the players. (laughs)

On your staff blog section on the Atlus website, you showed some videos of P3 while it was still in prototype form. One of the battle system prototypes had the battles seamlessly begin on the same map that the player explores in. With more advanced hardware now available, is this a direction that the team will be considering seriously for future Persona/SMT games?
It may be possible, depending on how we lay out the game system. But even if the hardware performance increases, we still have to allocate a decent portion of the console's finite processing resources to achieve that. If we keep the same system layout that P4 uses, I don't think we'll make it one of our top priorities. Though of course, you never know until you actually make the game.

The first two Persona titles were games that could be a bit tough to enjoy for those gamers who aren't hardcore into RPGs, but with P3, and especially P4, those games have been created in a way that feels far more inviting to new or more casual players. Is this new direction in accessibility going to be the standard going forward for the Persona series? Do you think this change in focus, as well as the inclusion of things that might appeal to more casual gamers, such as the Social Links system, were a big factor in P3 becoming so popular?
To be honest, we never intend to make the games "casual," so to speak. To make a young-adult title that many RPG fans can enjoy—that was our goal, and as a result, the fact that many people can enjoy them may have given players a different impression from the previous titles. I want more people to enjoy the games that are uniquely Atlus; that's my stance, and it will remain so as I continue my work.

Were you at all surprised by P3's success and accolades in the West, especially considering how much of the game directly references daily life in Japan? Did you have any expectations that it would do well here?
I didn't have any expectations. I thought Japanese high school students' daily lives and annual events would not be accepted overseas at all. As both a developer and a gamer, I can empathize with the Western players for their understanding and open-mindedness.

Even though P3 and P4 were obviously made with the Japanese audience in mind, were there any times during the development process where you maybe did something differently due to considering the non-Japanese audience?
I have to admit, I had no time to take the overseas audience into consideration. I'd like to do so in the next title. The other day, I received a written letter from an overseas Persona 3 fan. From the letter's words of encouragement, I could feel the passion of our overseas fans. (laughs)

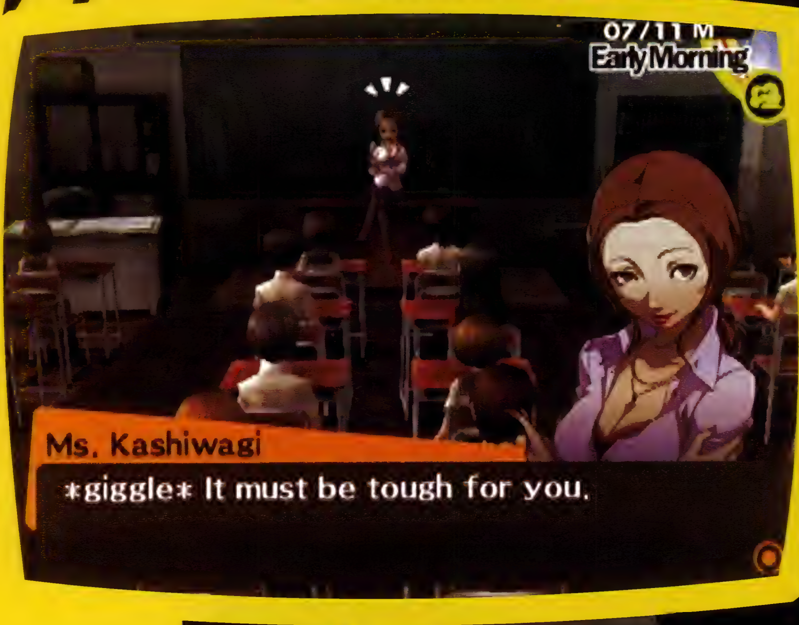
Western fans have never had a chance to play an official English version of Persona 2: Innocent Sin. Any chance you could put in a good word or two for us? Perhaps a PSP edition of both P2 chapters?
All I can say to them right now is, "I'm sorry!" But we have various plans for the Persona series, so please look forward to them.

There have been Persona cell phone games in Japan, but have PSP and DS been considered?
We always consider various platforms in our discussions. In this industry, I'm sure that hardware selection often becomes the key issue from a business management standpoint. But to achieve the most enjoyable gameplay, I believe you must tailor the game concept to the platform and the target user.

Kanji Tatsumi

Kanji is seen by his peers and most in Inaba as a rough and rowdy street punk, but in reality he's a person who cares for those around him and will fight to protect them until the very end. Confusion about his feelings leads him to unlock the power of Take Mikazuchi, a menacing Persona who can dish out punishment as effectively as Kanji himself.

> **...WE TRIED TO GIVE THE PLAYERS OF PERSONA 4 A DEFINITE GOAL AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE...**
> **-KATSURA HASHINO**



Ms. Kashiwagi
giggle It must be tough for you.

04/13 W
Evening

Do you hope to direct another main series MegaTen game, or continue with Persona due to its newfound popularity?
I've been involved with the main series in games like Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne, and the Persona series is my most recent project, so I have strong feelings for both. But I have no strong urge to make a game for any particular series. My wish is to contribute to the Atlus brand by directing a title that people would say, "Only Hashino can make such a game." Also, continuing to make titles for just one series isn't good for the development team. I'd like to try different things so we can revitalize the series and make it more enjoyable.

What sort of high school student were you, Mr. Hashino?
I remember that I was always playing games. I worked part-time to buy new games and systems. Once, after I had earned the money I wanted, I told my employer that I was quitting, which caused him a lot of trouble. What a jerk, huh? (laughs)

What sort of Persona do you wish you had?
I already use many facades as I live my life as a member of society, so I don't think I need another one. (laughs) But lately my shoulders have been stiff, so a Persona that could give me massages would be nice. Maybe Shiva, so he can give me an electric massage?

For any of our readers who never played P3, what would you most like to say to them in regards to why they should play P4?
You should be able to feel the sense of fulfillment and maturity in our latest title. Many players in Japan agreed to this and really enjoyed the game—even the ones who didn't play Persona 3. If this title piques your interest in any way, I encourage you to try it out. After playing through Persona 4, I bet you'll want to go back and see what Persona 3 is like.

Finally, do you have a message for all of the Western Persona and MegaTen fans?
I'd like to evolve the Persona series to new heights. I'm also thinking of trying to make a completely new game, like how we started the Trauma Center series, so please look forward to that. Thank you very much for your continued support.

Interview #2

Shigenori Soejima

Art Director, Persona 4

play: What is your earliest memory of the MegaTen series?
Shigenori Soejima: I still have strong memories of Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner, since it was the very first title that I worked on.

You're known for your RPG art, but we've heard that you didn't play a lot of RPGs growing up. What types of games did you play, and how do you feel they influenced your artwork?
I played everything—shooting games, fighting games, racing games, etc. I liked RPGs too, but I tended to keep playing the same game for a long time, so I didn't play that many titles. As for RPGs, I really liked Wizardry. I also played Ultima Online for quite a while, so I guess I favor the classics.

Did you initially want to become a mangaka, or were you always focused on illustration? What lead you to Atlus?
When I was little, I dreamed of becoming a comic book artist, and that's what motivated me to draw. Later in high school, I started getting into games. I wanted to design fighting game characters, so I started focusing on illustrations.

Tell us about your senpai Kazuma Kaneko. Did you feel pressure taking over the Persona character design reins from him? Have you tried to consciously emulate elements of his design? Has he had a large influence on your work?
I definitely felt some pressure, but it was more from my sense of responsibility to create something that could be accepted by the existing Persona fans, rather than taking over Mr. Kaneko's work. Naturally, he had a large influence on me, since I was his assistant for a long time. So when I approached the designs, I thought I didn't need to consciously emulate his style, and if I explored what my own strengths were instead, I could come up with something new.

How does total art direction on a game differ from character design? Do you begin with the world design and weltanschauung, or the characters? What is the process?
An art director controls the visuals of the entire game, whereas a character designer creates the designs of just the characters; they are two completely different roles. Whether the character design comes to life or not solely depends on the overall art direction, so I put more weight into the world view and work on it first.

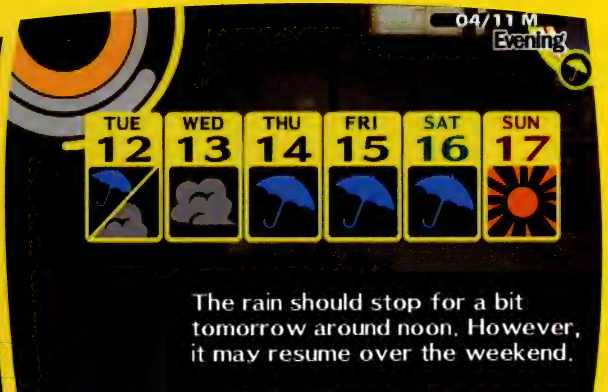
Blue seemed to be the theme color for P3, and yellow for P4. Are theme colors a conscious choice? What do they represent?
When I work on a title, its theme color is very important to me. I think when a person remembers things unconsciously, what leaves the strongest impression isn't words or shape, but color. P3's theme color, blue, symbolizes adolescence; P4's yellow is the color of happiness. Both meanings are tied to Japanese culture, so it might be hard for western audiences to understand.

Did your approach to design differ in any way between P3 and P4?
They were basically the same. I tried a lot of different things in P3 to strive for originality and freshness, but in P4, I expanded on the same method of art direction for the existing fans of Persona 3.

Rise Kujikawa

Rise, better known to her fans as Risette, is one of Japan's top idols. When the stress of being in the public eye becomes too much for her, she comes to Inaba to stay with her grandmother at the family tofu shop. After being targeted by the mysterious killer, she joins the team and takes over duties from Teddie as your tactical and navigational support via her Persona Himiko.

...PERSONA 4'S YELLOW IS THE COLOR OF HAPPINESS.
-SHIGENORI SOEJIMA



The rain should stop for a bit tomorrow around noon. However, it may resume over the weekend.

P4's new weather system replaces P3's moon cycles.

What are the difficulties of designing characters to appeal to a broad range of tastes? Which P4 characters were easy to design, and which difficult?
There are some opposing elements when designing a unique character and designing a character that's appealing to many people. Fortunately, there are many characters in P4, and I designed them so any type of player could find at least one favorite character. This tendency is especially strong in the design of the female characters. Supporting roles were easy to draw since they were very unique. The protagonist, however, is the player's alter ego in the game, so I had a lot of trouble making his design appealing to everyone's tastes.

Was there any particular inspiration for all the P4 party characters to wear glasses? Do you wear glasses yourself?
I imagined how the characters would look if they all wore glasses, and it became very interesting so I decided to go ahead and use that idea. From the story's point of view, the glasses signify the danger of seeing events through a filter, and what that really means. Because I don't wear glasses myself, I had a personal interest in wearing glasses as fashion as well.

Do any special difficulties arrive from imbuing characters all wearing the same uniform with personality?
It does make it difficult to express personality. But wearing the uniform is a school rule, so the personality is expressed in the design by thinking about how each character would react to that rule. One character may strictly follow regulations, while another wears it casually. Some may defy the rules and not wear the uniform at all... It's similar to how the soldiers wear their uniforms differently in war movies.

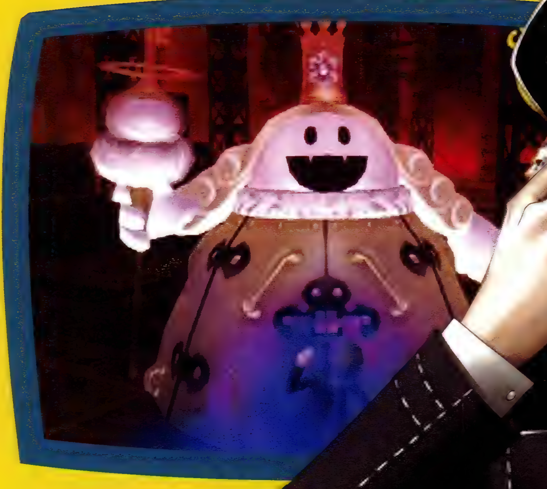
Tell us about the Persona design. All of the P4 Personas have names from Japanese myth, but don't look very Japonesque.
Japanese youth nowadays aren't too familiar with Japanese legends and history. (I'm sure no student anywhere in the world enjoys studying...) So I designed the Personas as images that would come to their minds when they hear the name of the Japanese gods. This is in keeping with the game's conceit that a Persona is the other self that one imagines oneself to be.

Who is your favorite P4 character and Persona?
My favorite character is the protagonist, and my favorite Persona is Yukiko's Konohana Sakuya.

Which do you enjoy more, character or Persona design? Which is more taxing?
They each are fun in their own way. For the Personas, creating the design itself is fun and difficult. And for the characters, having to animate the designs I made is both taxing and rewarding.

Walk us through the process of creating a piece like our cover. How long does it take? At what point does the analog process on paper become digital? What tools and software do you use?
When I'm designing a character, I can't summon my inspiration while staring at a monitor, so I always draw a ton of sketches on paper. But once the design is set, I do the character illustrations digitally from start to finish. I use a Wacom tablet, drawing software called SAI, and Photoshop for digital painting. The time it takes varies depending on the magnitude of the piece, but it usually takes about three to four days to complete.

What sort of high school student were you, Mr. Soejima?
I was a plain, normal student who enjoyed everyday life. Though I did tend to come up with some ideas and think about them all day.



What sort of Persona do you wish you had?
I'd like a Persona that can reproduce the images I have in my head directly onto paper. The creative part of my work is to imagine the design, and from that point on it's just a matter of recreating that design onto another medium.

Priestess
Konohana Sakuya
LV 39
NEXT LV
6547
Str
Wk
St 15
Ma 35
En 26
Ag 23
Lu 25
NEXT LV 39

> Yukiko's Persona, Konohana Sakuya, has leveled up!

How does it feel to know that, thanks to Persona, you now have many fans all over the world? When you were starting out as an artist, did you ever give much thought to the idea that your artwork would be seen and appreciated by people outside of Japan?
I've never been that conscious about it, but now that you mention it, it does stir some deep emotions in me. I'm not an artist; I don't draw for myself. I'm always thinking about whether the people who see my work will enjoy it or not. From now on, I'd like to think of the overseas fans—including those in the U.S.—when drawing, and I believe that doing so will lead to my own growth as well.

Finally, do you have a message for all of your fans, and the fans of Persona, in the West?
Thank you very much for playing Persona, and for appreciating my artwork. Since I live in Japan, I don't get to hear your comments and criticisms directly, so please send me messages. I will try and do my best to create games that you can all enjoy. Thank you very much.

Interview #3

Shoji Meguro

Composer, Persona 4

play: What is your earliest memory of the Megami Tensei series?
Shoji Meguro: Right after I joined Atlus, I was put in charge of composing the BGM for Revelations: Persona on PlayStation. In Japan, new employees go through a few months of training before officially joining the company; the tune used in the Velvet Room, "Aria of the Soul," was my very first composition during my training period.

Naoto Shirogane

Naoto Shirogane dreams of being a hard-boiled detective, earning him the name "Detective Prince." He comes to Inaba to aid in the murder investigations when it seems like the local police are out of their league. Suspicious of the activities of the protagonist and his friends, Naoto holds the potential to be either friend or foe... as well as holding an even deeper secret.

Tell us about your musical background. Did you play in any bands? What led you to musical composition? What led you to Atlus?
I started learning the electronic organ when I was four or five, and I continued for more than ten years. I learned the basics of arrangement during that time, and around middle school, I began composing original music. I bought a synthesizer and other electronic instruments as soon as I entered high school, and started playing guitar at the age of sixteen. I teamed up with a friend during my high school years and tried my hand at electronic sequencing. And in college, I played guitar in a band with my friend.

I joined Atlus after I finished grad school. I had majored in mechanical engineering, but I convinced my parents that it was extremely difficult to get a job at a major tech-related company due to the recession, and took employment tests at various video game companies. I chose the game industry because at the time, I couldn't think of any other way of earning a steady salary as a musician. I sent in a demo tape and had two interviews before I was employed at Atlus.

Tell us about your composition process. Do you have a routine you follow, or do you sit down at the keyboard when inspiration strikes?
I take a wide variety of approaches, depending on the song. Mainly, I write down things that come to mind in my daily life, and wait for inspiration to strike as I play keyboard or guitar.

You're well known for your rock and jazz—do you find it more difficult to compose in other genres? Easier?
I generally have no preference for the genre. However, I'd like to avoid composing ethnic music other than Japanese. I might be OK if I manage to grasp the essence of a particular ethnic music, but I strongly believe that it's wrong to compose ethnic music while only being familiar with the surface elements.

How do you approach the scoring of a Shin Megami Tensei, a Devil Summoner, and a Persona? All have a vastly different sound.
I'm not trying to take a distinct approach for each series; it's more like working on a title-by-title basis, according to its individual flavor. So if the next Persona title is going to be a serious story with heavy occult influences, the music may turn out to be closer to the Shin Megami Tensei style.

How did you approach the scoring of P4 versus P3? Did the suburban setting or mystery theme prompt changes in style?
Yes, I composed the music of P4 by taking into account the suburban setting and the mystery theme.

At least in the West, for a long time video game music was not considered to be "real" music, but now that opinion seems to have changed. Was there ever a time when people didn't take the work you were doing as serious as you would have liked? Do you think there's been a change in the perception of video game music in the twelve years that you've been working at Atlus?
I believe it's the same between Japan and the U.S. I decided to join a video game company only because I learned that with PlayStation and Saturn, you could play game music from a CD. I didn't own a NES and all I had for SNES were a Mahjong game and a soccer game, so I wasn't exposed to any game music during that time. As a result, I myself had a biased view of game music, based solely on what I imagined it to be like, and didn't consider it to be "real" music.

So when I joined Atlus, I thought I could compose PlayStation game music just as I would a regular music CD, but the reality was completely different. I had to compose music using samples of 100KB-200KB in size, and the end results sounded pretty cheap. At times, I was indirectly mocked by the composers who worked on the arranged versions of my songs for the game soundtrack albums.

The situation was about the same when we moved the platform to PlayStation 2, but in Digital Devil Saga, we could use streaming to play about half the songs. And in P3 and Devil Summoner: Raidou Kuzunoha vs. the Soulless Army, all the songs were streamed. That was the point at which I was finally able to express my music without making any compromises, and I felt that I made it to the starting line.

Tell us about the production of vocal themes. Do you write them for a specific vocalist, or choose one to suit the song?
We don't do any cross-promotions of that sort at Atlus, so I choose the artist that best fits the music and the lyrics.

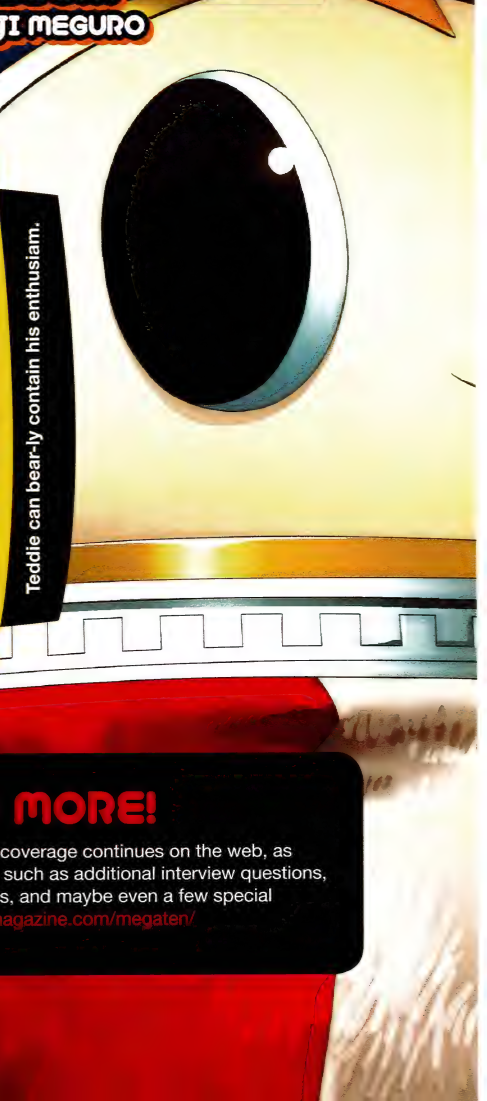
What sort of high school student were you, Mr. Meguro?
I didn't study at all. I even used to play catch during the short ten-minute break between classes.

What sort of Persona do you wish you had?
I was born in the year of the boar, so how about Amida Nyorai (Amitabha Tathagata), my patron god?

You gained a number of new Western fans thanks to the Persona 3 soundtrack, and no doubt the same will happen again with Persona 4. How does it feel to know that a worldwide audience listens to and enjoys your music?
I'm really worried about the English pronunciation... in the Japanese version, the characters spoke Japanese while the music was in English, so I think it was less noticeable. If we had more time and money, I would want to change the vocals in the overseas version into Japanese. Then I wouldn't have to worry about people saying the vocals sound like "Engrish," right?

Finally, do you have a message for your fans, and the fans of Persona, in the West?
We don't receive feedback directly from overseas. But through interviews and game sites, I can tell that the fans are very passionate and well informed about the game's intrinsic nature, and I'm deeply moved by it. We cannot help focusing on the Japanese market when developing games, but we will try our best to give our titles more worldwide appeal from now on. Thank you very much.

> THAT WAS THE POINT AT WHICH I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO EXPRESS MY MUSIC...
> -SHOJI MEGURO



Sensei! Let me at 'em!

Teddie can bear-ly contain his enthusiasm.

BUT WAIT... THERE'S MORE!

Our Shin Megami Tensei special isn't over just yet! The coverage continues on the web, as **play online** brings you online-exclusive bonus content, such as additional interview questions, screenshots and artwork, a history of the Persona series, and maybe even a few special surprises. Check out our extended coverage at: playmagazine.com/megaten/

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI SPECIAL Q & A
IMAGINE ONLINE

Persona 4 isn't the only Shin Megami Tensei game coming to our shores here soon; as we revealed last issue, Aeria Games will be bringing Shin Megami Tensei: Image Online to North America, giving English-speaking fans the chance to explore the Megami Tensei world in an MMORPG setting. I posed a few questions about the game to Spencer Chi, Producer, Aeria Games & Entertainment.

play: What kind of experience will people have when playing Shin Megami Tensei: Imagine Online?
Spencer Chi: Combine real-time combat and a world of mythical demons to ally and fight, and you have Imagine Online. When in battle, players can choose from a wide array of actions, such as sword slashing, gun shooting, countering, dodging, magic casting, or negotiating with demons. Players can summon any of their allied demons to unleash new sets of abilities and spells on to their opponents or allies. When traveling through the world, players will come across other players wearing new outfits or partnered with demons they've never seen before, and they'll say, "That's so cool! Where can I find that?"

WE KNOW THAT IF WE DON'T GET IT RIGHT, WE'LL BE LETTING OUR FANS DOWN
-SPENCER CHI

The MegaTen series is one that, over time, has developed an immense level of depth, personality, and culture. As a company that hasn't dealt with the franchise before, was there any concern with your ability to be able to handle the task of not only translating the game, but also making sure it retained that "MegaTen" feel at the same time?
The great thing about working on a title that has such a well-established franchise is that fans who know the series are everywhere. Within Aeria's staff, there are fans. Within our playing community, there are fans. During a job interview for Game Master, the candidate tried to bribe me with a lifetime of delivered homemade lunches if he could be a part of the MegaTen team. Although tempting, his offer still wasn't enough.

Playing a game in "Engrish" can be funny for a while, but that's not what we're going for. The dialogue is supposed to progress the storyline and set the tone for the game—it's not supposed to be a distraction. We know that if we don't get it right, we will be letting our fans down. Cave, Atlus, and our own staff are triple-checking the translations to make sure we get it right. The great thing about an online game versus a boxed retail game is that we can always make improvements where necessary through patches.

Naturally, SMT has a strong following in Japan, and the fans there love Imagine which has been out for over a year now. We are going to give the North American and European fans the same opportunity to enjoy the first MMO game of the franchise. Players of previous SMT games will recognize the style, the games' culture, the demons, and there will be no doubt that they're playing a MegaTen game—this time, they will be sharing the experience with friends online.

What kind of player is Imagine Online targeted at? Is this a game that people who aren't familiar with the MegaTen franchise will be able to get into and enjoy?
Imagine Online has several distinct appealing areas. If the strategic real-time fighting isn't enough, players can focus on negotiating with demons and fusing them together to form new breeds. For others, collecting the seemingly endless combinations of modern day and futuristic Tokyo clothing and accessories will be a game in itself.

This game is for the people who want to team up with their friends and level up with each other in dungeons. The spirit of the game is more cooperative than competitive. Because of this, it's easy for uninitiated players to come into the game and team up with more experienced players.

It is absolutely not a prerequisite to have played the other MegaTen games. If you have, you'll get the inner satisfaction of recognizing some of the demons and items from other games in the series. If you haven't played any of the other installments, the game is just as easy to pick up. The best part is that it's free. Players can play the full game at no cost to them, so it's risk-free. The game is completely funded by the sale of optional decorative clothing, weapons, and items that some players may want to buy.

Imagine Online really stands out from the MMORPG crowd for a number of reasons. What elements do you think most help the game differentiate itself from the other MMOs out there?
In many MMORPG games, players may have a small pet that follows them around and does some little task for them but is mostly there as an accessory. In Imagine Online, the demons are the center focus of the game. They are large—in many cases, several times the size of the player's character. Of course, that makes them better mounts.

In most other MMORPGs, the player controls one character at a time. If you can control multiple characters in another MMORPG, it's usually turn-based. In Imagine Online, you control both your character and your demon simultaneously in real-time. It makes the action a bit more fast-paced, and the decisions in character development play a bigger factor: "Will I be able to fire off a second round before the enemy gets close enough to strike?"

The important thing to remember is that MMOs are, at their root, social. A fun online game needs a friendly community of players and the support staff to run a steady supply of in-game events and to solve customer issues—free of charge. We listen to our community. Doing so led us to license the game, and it will continue to lead us to creating a fun gaming environment for all. Please come to our website (megaten.aeriagames.com) to see what's ahead.

System: Xbox360, PS3 | **Developer:** Vicious Cycle Software | **Publisher:** D3 | **Available:** Spring 2009

EAT LEAD:

The Return of Matt Hazard

Last Action Hero

words Heather Campbell

Sometimes a game's concept and execution make up for a limited design document. Sometimes, the graphics we see in screen-shots don't tell the full story. This, my brothers, is one of those times. Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard is a generic-looking third person action shooter. We're not blind. We get it. But the concept of the game (despite our limited exposure to the title) makes us very excited over here at Play.

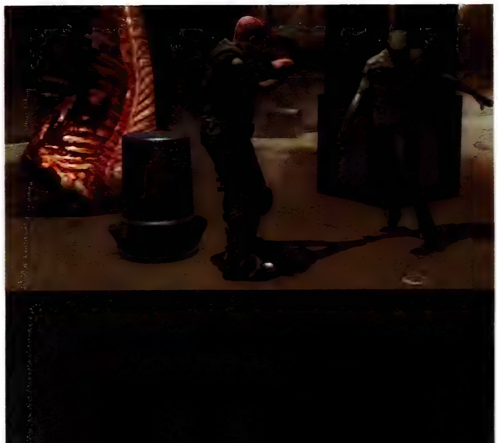
Eat Lead is the sequel to a bunch of games we've never played. The fictional story of Matt Hazard is that he used to be a great IP -- an 8-bit hero with a slew of great games. Like Duke Nukem, he was a muscle-bound bad-ass that chewed up cliches and spit them out like bullets. Slowly, as consoles progressed, his owners whored him out, until sometime in the mid nineties, he starred in a cart-racing game. Matt Hazard died inside, and his games died with him.

Smash to 2009, when an old foe has lured Hazard into his first next-gen game ... but is bending the rules in an effort to bring about Hazard's death.

In Play's short preview, Hazard hopped from one hiding spot to the next, in a familiar cover mechanic with a twist -- aim your cross-hairs at the next hiding spot, and Hazard will dash to it, often screaming, "Don't shoot me, don't shoot me!" as he does. Storming through a kitchen, he wise-cracked about the state of video-games by referencing Die Hard ("Sure, come out to a new game, have a few laughs ...") and other action-based properties, while killing bad-guys with big guns. The self-aware game doesn't dispose of villains in fountains of blood -- rather, they explode into bits of code. When Hazard is nearly through the level, his arch nemesis changes the game. Reprogramming the parameters on the fly, suddenly Hazard's victims come back to life as zombies ... and Hazard finds himself in an entirely different kind of game. Later, Hazard was seen busting through a Western level, and the development team hinted that seeing a few race-carts was probably very likely.

I hesitate to draw comparisons to two of my favorite titles, because frankly I don't know if Eat Lead deserves it, but it's hard to watch a game that knows it's a game without thinking about God Hand and No More Heroes. Who knows, sometimes just relishing the silliness of video-games can be enough to pump blood through a title. The marketing team behind Hazard has started a delicious viral campaign, with old clip-art powered websites popping up detailing Hazard's history. If the game is as much fun as the marketing, we may see more of Hazard in the next next ... next-gen.

> "The self-aware game doesn't dispose of villains in fountains of blood -- rather, they explode into bits of code."



IF YOU CAN DREAM IT,
YOU CAN BUILD IT.
BANJO-KAZOOIE®
NUTS & BOLTS
EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence
Comic Mischief
Microsoft game studios
RARE

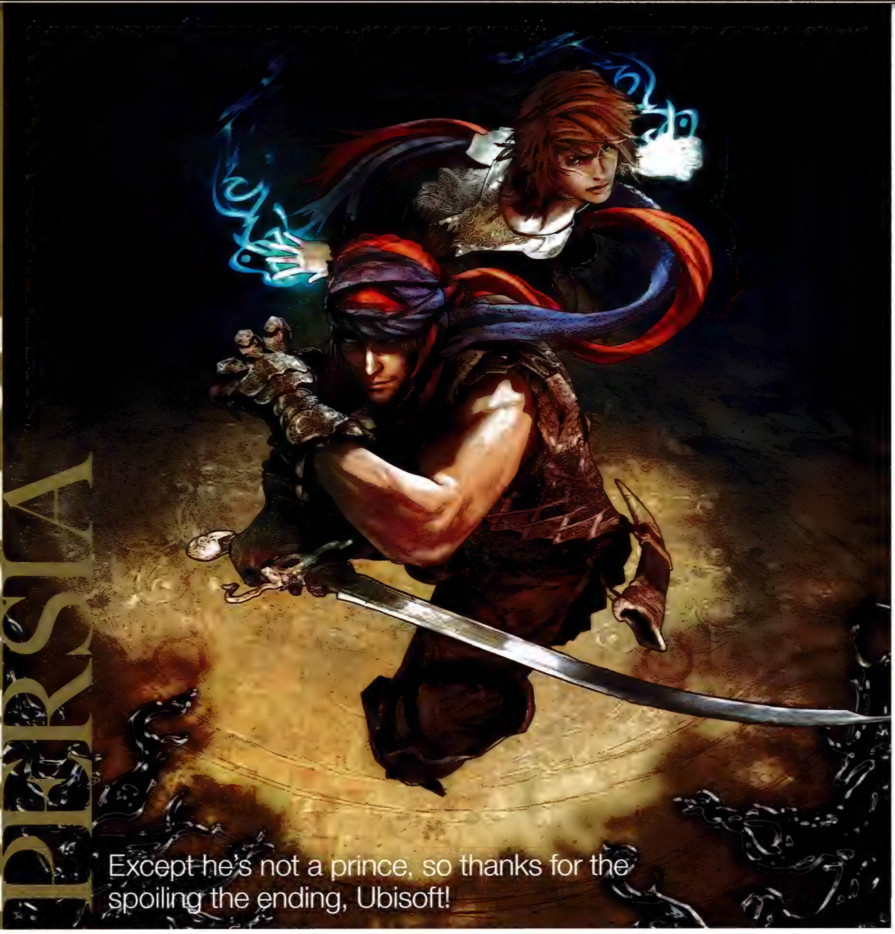
If it flies, floats, or drives, you can build it—and use it to explore six fantastic worlds. Over 100 unique parts and blueprints give you the power to create an unlimited array of ingenious new vehicles to tackle over 150 different challenges.

Jump in.

XBOX 360.

System: Xbox 360, PS3 | **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal | **Publisher:** Ubisoft | **Available:** 12/2/2008

PRINCE OF PERSIA



Except he's not a prince, so thanks for the spoiling the ending, Ubisoft!

words Casey Loe

Prince of Persia is shaping up to be a thing of beauty—and every bit as strange as the developers promised that it would be. Like Ubisoft Montreal's Assassin's Creed, it displays both remarkable ingenuity and a total disregard for traditional video game structure.

The Prince's world is composed of 24 individual levels, linked together to make a single contiguous map. In each you must reach a patch of "fertile ground" by following a linear platforming path, defeat its guardian, and have your sidekick Elika purify the ground to release 45 "light seeds" into the area. Collecting those light seeds—which is the only real free exploration in the game— allows you to unlock one of four new powers for the Prince. Each power will allow you to reach the fertile grounds of four additional levels, so diligent seed hunters will always have several options to choose from.

The game's focus is on silky smooth platforming, which feels quite different from Assassin's Creed but is ultimately just as satisfying. The game excels at making spectacular actions both easy and predictable, an impressive feat. There's little frustration, since it isn't actually possible to die in Prince of Persia—If ever you fall, Elika will catch you and return you to a stable platform. That may make the game sound ridiculously easy, and indeed, it initially is. But the farther you get from the game's central hub, the more extravagant the jumping parts become, and the frequent platforms give way to long stretches of wall jumps, poles and log-flume slides with nary a stable patch of ground in sight.

It's equally impossible to die in combat, where once again Elika is there to bail you out if your life is ever imperiled. Being immortal doesn't necessarily make the game a pushover, since certain guardians are themselves indestructible, and it may require an elaborate series of actions to knock them off of a tower or under a collapsing roof. But there isn't much point in standard henchmen battles if there's no threat of defeat, which is likely why the game rarely bothers with them. Most levels in our preview version featured no more than a single non-boss battle.

Elika is so far and away the most competent sidekick ever that it's something of a mystery why she doesn't just beat the game herself. Not only is she immortal (a *lot* of that going around), but she serves dozens of useful functions, from playing a role in certain battle combos to firing off balls of energy that can guide you to whatever level you've selected from the map. She looks amazing too; Elika mirrors everything the Prince does, giving the pair the impression of an impossibly talented synchronized acrobatics team. The character animation is absolutely stunning, as are the game's distinctive cell-shaded environments. The upbeat, Persian-flavored soundtrack adds to the game's enchanting flavor, making it seem like a fairy tale come alive—at least until the Prince opens his mouth and a wisecrack from Uncharted's Nathan Drake spills out. Nathan North is a fine voice actor, but how many middle-eastern themed games must Ubisoft Montreal make before they tire of writing heroes who talk like California frat boys?

> "A jumping game in which you cannot fall and a fighting game in which you cannot lose."

That issue aside, our preview copy of Prince of Persia has left me both enchanted and confused. It's a good thing we can't review it till next month, because it'll take me at *least* that long to figure out whether a jumping game in which you cannot fall and a fighting game in which you cannot lose is forward-thinking innovation or Wii Music-esque self-wankery.

> "We're trying to penetrate deeper into the psychological realm, rather than trying to describe what's going on and where it's going on."

INTERVIEW INON ZUR

We caught up with renowned game composer Inon Zur as he was cramming the Northwest Symphonia Orchestra into a Seattle studio to record Prince of Persia's powerful original score. Zur is also the man behind the soundtracks to Fallout 3, Crysis, Baldur's Gate II, and over 40 other games.

How did your collaboration with the Northwest Symphonia Orchestra originally come about?
In 1997 I got my first gig in video games, which was Klingon Academy, and I got a budget for a live orchestra. So I started asking around—of course we couldn't afford to do union or anything, so people said, "why don't you go to Seattle? It's a good orchestra." And that's how it all started. Since then nearly every major game I've orchestrated has been done here... But this is the biggest session ever for Prince of Persia, and one of the biggest sessions I've ever done.

How many people do you have in there?
Right now we have about 40 people, and every cue is being played twice, so it's like an 80-piece orchestra.

What aspect of the game inspires your compositions the most? Do you focus more on the location, or the mood of the scene?
That's a very good question, because before we used to be more influenced by locations and the actual action on the screen. But here we're going more into the emotional part, trying to penetrate deeper into the psychological realm rather than trying to describe what's going on and where it's going on. The Prince grew up. He's not a kid anymore.

When you're basing it heavily on emotional cues, how do you surprise people? There's music people expect to see in sad scenes, and action parts...
For example, many times in battles people expect something fast and percussive, so in the Ahriman fight we actually went very slow. It's very menacing and dramatic, almost like a requiem. So sometimes we will play against people's expectations a little. But sometimes we'll just give it the way it is.

The game has had a graphical overhaul into a radically new visual style. Are you doing anything similar with the music to match?
[Music Supervisor Simon Landry]
We wanted to make the music more interactive, to follow what the player does more closely. As soon as he gets more acrobatic, the music gets another layer of energy and intensity. So I think the music will be more complex. There's about two hours of music recorded for the game, and I think with the majestic feel of the orchestrated music, [the impact] will be as huge as it is graphically.

Composer Inon Zur (left) and Music Supervisor Simon Landry (right)

[Inon Zur] The whole approach was first to take it more into the unnatural realm, the more majestic realm, *The Lord of the Rings* in Persia, basically. It was never meant to be very realistic—the Prince can do things that are not realistic. Magic has a big part in the game, so we took that approach and really brought it to the composition; everything is a little bit over the top and larger than life. The others [Prince of Persia games] were a little more down to earth, and this one is more of a fairy tale.

How much do you need to know about the sound programming to do your job?
I always like to stay close and know as much as I can about how exactly they're going to use the music in the game, and how they'll implement all the musical cues. Knowing that helps me not only compose something that will work, but make suggestions as to how it can be used. So I believe that the game composer should be very immersed in the whole programming part of the game.

Is it frustrating coming from a film scoring background, where you know what exact note will be playing over what exact moment of film?
It's a good thing and a bad thing. In film, the challenge is to stay locked to the picture, and try to give an emotional dimension to the scenes. In games it's more challenging, because the scene is so free. So you have to tap a little into the psychological elements of the gamer, because there's no way to predict what's going on.

Are you doing anything with regional instruments?
Oh yeah. I recorded a lot of Arabic instruments like dombuks and Arabic ney flutes. I'm using a lot of samples of Arabic and Indian violin, and all the percussions are Arabic. I have some singing from an Israeli singer who sings in Arabic styles, the same one who worked on the previous games.

Speaking of unconventional instruments, I'd like to ask about how you approached the Fallout 3 soundtrack? Are you repeating some of the discordant elements of the soundtrack you did for Fallout Tactics?
Yes and no. This Fallout is more dramatic. It's less about ambience and a little more about the outside world, so some of the cues still have this weirdness to them... We use a lot of strange sounds, harmonicas, banjos in the orchestra... The previous one was just plain weird. This one is by a different developer, and they really wanted to go a little more towards mainstream.

It seems like a difficult franchise to compose for, since it's very dramatic, but also very humorous and sarcastic...
Exactly! I think the approach is that the music should be really serious, and then the songs from the 50's are such a contradiction that the collision between the score and songs create a comedic, sarcastic effect.

Can you tell us anything about the other three games you're working on?
No. [Laughs] And it's actually four... For the last three months, I've been working about fourteen hours a day!

UNITED BY INDIVIDUALITY

Not long ago, hundreds of Scion owners and their cars converged on the Nevada desert. They brought xBs, tCs, xDs and xAs. It's what makes them different, that brings them together. Experience the community yourself at scion.com/scionunited.

Vehicles shown are actual Scion owner cars, some may be modified with non-Genuine Scion parts and accessories. Modification with these non-Genuine Scion parts or accessories will void the Scion warranty, may negatively impact vehicle performance and safety, and may not be street legal. Scion and the Scion logo are trademarks of Toyota Motor Corporation. Other trademarks and trade names appearing on the vehicles are those of their respective owners. © 2008 Scion, a marque of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

OF A KIND.
scion
what moves you

System: Wii | **Developer:** Deep Silver | **Publisher:** Deep Silver | **Available:** 2009

Cursed Mountain

Fear on high

The idea of Wii-exclusive is toxic in some circles, conjuring images of a publisher looking at numbers and deciding that the underpowered mainstream Wii is where the golden pot at the end of the rainbow obviously must glow these days. Newly formed studio Deep Silver looked at the Wii with pure intentions: they genuinely believe their survival horror game had to be on the Wii, because there simply was no better way to express their core idea than with the Wii Remote and Nunchuck.

I give Deep Silver the benefit of the doubt; this is an original and highly ambitious game for the Wii, beginning with the audacity of its theme. Cursed Mountain is set in the 1980s, somewhere in the Himalayas, and it deals with the spiritual ideals of Buddhism. The main character is a rock climber, and there are no traditional weapons, no guns or bombs or anything that goes bang. Attacks are handled by tracing ancient prayer symbols onscreen, as the enemy exposes their core inside the hazy mist of a parallel realm, known as Bardo—the place the soul roams between the living and the dead.

You don't need a map in the game. The towering mountain setting will be your guide, where a continuing incline reveals that you're going in the right direction. Running is limited because of the altitude; the demo didn't reveal how this might play into the final gameplay, but you can imagine the possibilities of coming across a dangerous moment and lacking the ability to flee without collapsing in exhaustion. **Brady Fiechter**

Cyclone!
Aya

System: Wii | **Developer:** Tamsoft | **Publisher:** D3 | **Available:** February 10, 2009

Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers

Zombies in Bikinis!?

"Saki seems to be cosplaying as Saya, from Blood: The Last Vampire."

I bet as soon as you saw that title, you got excited. Like me, you imagined that the adjective *Bikini* described the *Zombies* in the title. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As much as you (and I) may want a game about slaying bikini-*wearing* zombies, D3 is bringing us a game about cute girls in bikinis ... versus traditionally rag-bedecked undead.

Playing as Aya or Saki, two sisters graced with an ability to wage war against the undead, this third-person action game features co-op or single-player sword-fighting, Wiimote-swinging adventure. Aya wears a bikini, by the way. Saki seems to be cosplaying as Saya, from Blood: The Last Vampire. Mowing through rooms of the damned, the girls must balance their staggering sword prowess against the previously unknown fact that zombie guts make everything tacky. What's more: Too much fighting unlocks the girls' Rage mode, giving them greater powers, while draining their life away.

Best part of the preview? When your sword gets covered in blood, you swing your Wiimote to shuck it clean. Otherwise, it'll get stuck in those zombies. Because ... that's what happens with zombie blood. It makes swords slow and sticky. **Heather Campbell**

Presenting the
Bose® Computer MusicMonitor®

Performance you may never have thought possible from only two speakers this small.

The Bose Computer MusicMonitor® was developed for the growing number of people who use their computers for personal entertainment, and want accurate sound reproduction from a small and elegant system. According to Rich Warren of the *News-Gazette,* "If you want a pair of exceptionally small speakers with incredibly big sound for any purpose, listen no further."

Our best two-piece computer sound system. Until now, the rich low tones necessary for high-quality desktop sound have come only from large speakers or three-piece systems with a bass module. The MusicMonitor® establishes for us a new threshold in the accuracy of music reproduction. As Arlen Schweiger of *Electronic House* reports, "The folks at Bose really know how to shrink a product while maintaining a big sound." It is the first time we have been able to produce sound quality like this with only two such small enclosures containing all the electronics and speakers.

Proprietary Bose technologies. The unexpected sound quality is made possible through a combination of unique Bose technologies, including our dual internal opposing passive radiators. This invention allows the system to deliver faithful low note reproduction and musical accuracy, despite its small size. Dennis Barker says in *Digital TV DesignLine* that "after a listening test, I was quite impressed with this tiny pair of speakers."

Enjoy all your digital entertainment with the richness it deserves. The contemporary metal design and small size make the MusicMonitor® system a welcome addition to your desk or workspace. Digital music files sound more lifelike than they would with ordinary computer speakers this size. Downloaded videos sound better, too. And setup is simple. It should take you about as long to connect this system as it takes to remove it from the box.

FREE shipping with your order.

Listen risk free for 30 days. The best way to judge the performance of any sound system is in the unique acoustics of the environment where you'll use it. That's why we invite you to try the MusicMonitor® risk free for 30 days. When you call, ask about using your own major credit card to make **12 easy payments,** with no interest charges from Bose.* Then listen, and discover why Bose is the most respected name in sound.

1-800-407-2673, ext. CH349 | www.Bose.com/CMM

BOSE®
Better sound through research®

*Bose payment plan available on orders of $299-$1500 paid by major credit card. Separate financing offers may be available for select products. See website for details. Down payment is 1/12 the product price plus applicable tax and shipping charges, charged when your order is shipped. Then, your credit card will be billed for 11 equal monthly installments beginning approximately one month from the date your order is shipped, with 0% APR and no interest charges from Bose. Credit card rules and interest may apply. U.S. residents only. Limit one active financing program per customer. ©2008 Bose Corporation. Patent rights issued and/or pending. Financing and free shipping offer not to be combined with other offers or applied to previous purchases, and subject to change without notice. Risk free refers to 30-day trial only and does not include return shipping. Delivery is subject to product availability. Quotes reprinted with permission.

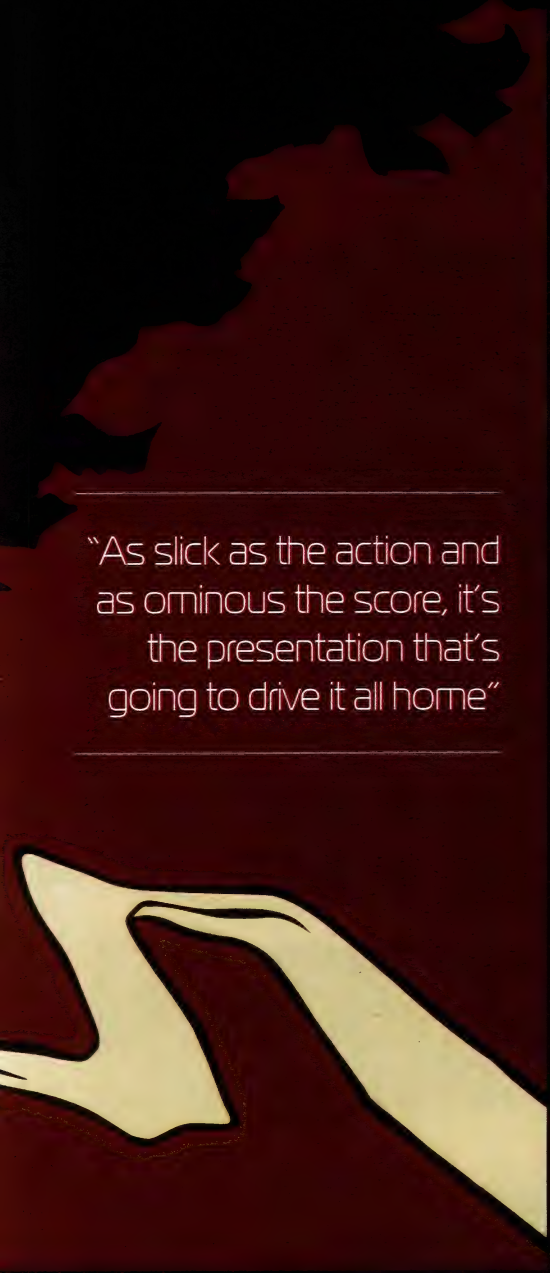
System: PS3, Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Namco Bandai Games | **Publisher:** Namco Bandai Games | **Available:** January

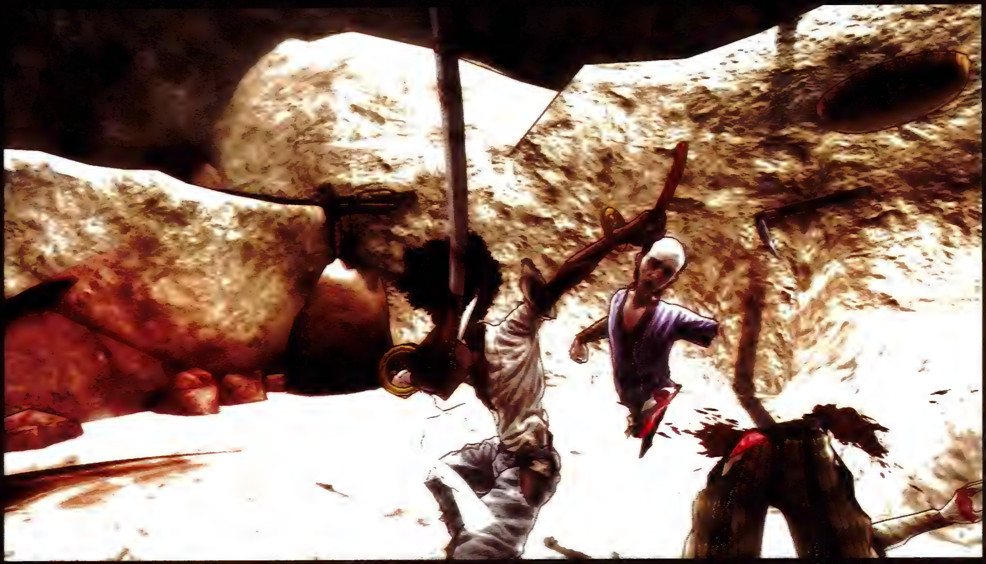
Afro Samurai

What's black and white and red all over?

words Dave Halverson

How many times have you seen a movie, DVD, or TV show and ponder how great it would be if there were a game behind it, especially if the studio given the task were perfectly suited to bringing it to interactive life? I'll bet quite a few; although I'm also willing to wager that the ones that did come to fruition fell short of your expectations. It isn't often that the right material falls into the right hands in this business; but on the rare occasion it does, it's usually because fate intervened. Such is the case with Afro Samurai, a property so altogether transcendent that the wrong hands would be worse than no hands at all. The chances of a self-published manga being adapted into a TV miniseries are slim to begin with, but to be produced by GONZO animation studios and then cross the pond with Sam Jackson attached as a co-producer and in the leading role, not to mention a soundtrack produced by the RZA, well, that's the perfect storm of East meets West meets Hollywood right there. Experiencing Afro Samurai for the first time, anime fan or not, is a mind-blowing experience. It's disturbing, brutal, dramatic, and beautiful (and thanks to Ninja Ninja, even a little funny)

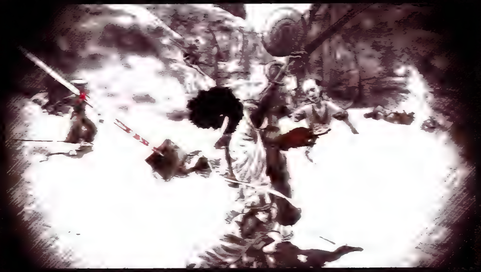




"As slick as the action and as ominous the score, it's the presentation that's going to drive it all home"

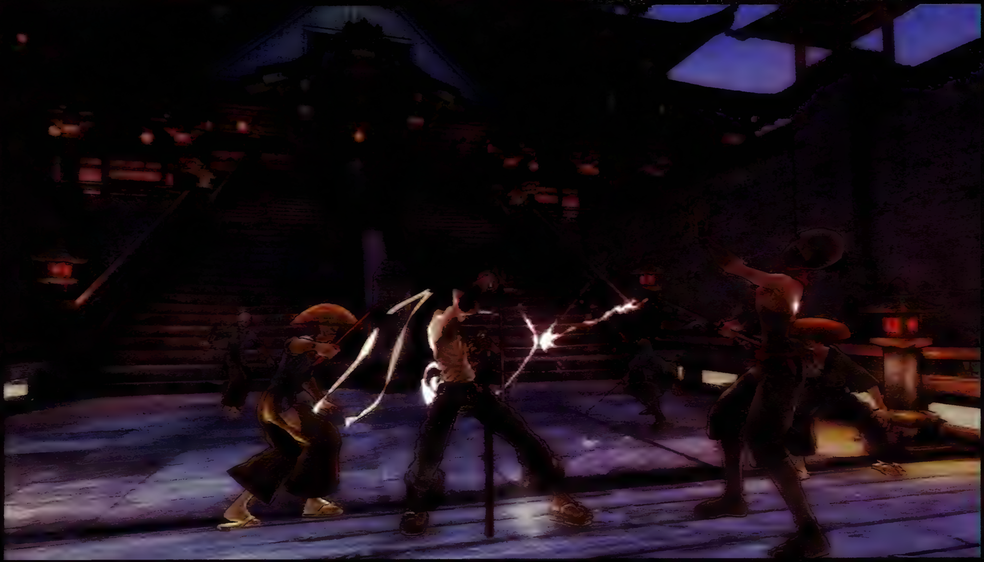
all at the same time, but it's the tone and animation style that make it bigger than life.

Remarkably, I felt that same tone in the game from the opening credits on. You can see and feel the team's dedication to recreating the graceful brutality and wickedness, as well as the dogmatic hip-hop score, in every facet of the game. The soundtrack doesn't build—it attacks. I put my hands in the air. And the action is perfectly pitched—no "hack 'n' slash" in this house. There's big time nuance to the combat. Light and heavy attacks, blocking, evading, and kicking, the action feels fast and taut. Should Afro become surrounded, which happens frequently, using Focus (LT) simultaneously slows down the action and turns the screen black and white, leaving only the color red. Cue the blood bath as Afro vertically slices opponents into collapsing halves, sweep kicks them off their feet to slice them in two in mid-air, and performs a myriad of proximity evasion maneuvers that I'm sure we'll be building on throughout the game.



As slick as the action and as ominous the score, it's the presentation that's going to drive it all home. The character skins and clothing are like nothing we've seen—coated in a dense layer of permanent manga shading, but not at the expense of delicate textures such as wrinkles and gauzy-looking material. Afro's clothes flutter in harmony with his movements and his afro is in constant fluid motion. He's totally dynamic to the environment too, which has an even more dramatic effect than usual, given the amazing hand-drawn 3D look. He's smoking too, hell yeah, and the essential four-letter words fly. The Afro team also has a keen grasp of establishing mood through color. The skylines alone speak volumes and the interiors are painstakingly detailed, richly colored and ornate. Early in the game as Afro approaches his first big battle, the booming soundtrack transitions to a scratchy old classic Kung Fu theme as thick black outlines shoot across the screen to frame multiple views. That's how Afro Samurai had to be made…and the swordplay is just the beginning.

By the end of act 1, Afro's climbing, wall running, perching, bounding, and dashing across narrow beams. There are switches to throw that trigger old-world cause and effect mechanisms like something out of Big Trouble in Little China; doors to kick in; and a giant palace to assail like something out of Tomb Raider in Edo Japan-era manga style. The adventure and story elements come fast and suggest ridiculously high quality. The script is, of course, superb, and the cast, well, Ron Pearlman, Kelly Hu, Sam Jackson…it doesn't get any better. Pour yourself a tall glass of lemonade and let the countdown begin.



TOKYO GAME SHOW 2008

words Nick Des Barres
Dai Kohama

Tokyo Game Show 2008 was the largest video game event in history. The figures dwarf E3 in its heyday: Four days long, 209 company booths, 879 playable games, and 200,000 attendees. On the surface, the Japanese video game industry would appear to be roaring along; the truth, however, is somewhat bleaker. At the show's opening keynote, entitled "What Does The World Want From Japan's Game Industry?", Square Enix CEO Yoichi Wada made a sweeping declaration: In the the world of video games, Japan is no longer on top.

It was a message his colleagues very much needed to hear. Wada's keynote would set the tone for the entire show—a grand total of one "next-gen" announcement was made (Castlevania), and only 10.5% of the games on display were for PS3 or 360. By contrast, handheld titles comprised 44.5%. In a country where traditional console gaming is on a sharp decline, simple, low-tech handheld games make smart business sense. But in the West, consumers have come to expect mega-budget "event" games of the type only a handful of Japanese developers seem willing—or able—to produce.

They will have to learn to do so, Wada says, if Japan wants to remain competitive on the world stage. According to Wada's figures, the domestic Japanese market only accounts for a fifth of worldwide video game sales. Japan's industry is at a critical juncture, and the swath of simple, casual, poppy DS and Wii games at TGS only served to reinforce the point. Wada closed his talk with a dark notion: As a heavy smoker, he said, it would take a doctor pronouncing him near-death from cancer to quit. Perhaps the Japanese game industry needs to face a similar situation before it will pursue widespread HD development. Although many worthy games were on display, TGS 2008 was the most disappointing Japanese game show in recent memory.

Top 10 Playable Games

01. **Resident Evil 5** Capcom **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360**
02. **Street Fighter IV** Capcom **PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 & PC**
03. **Star Ocean: The Last Hope** Square Enix **Xbox 360**
04. **The King of Fighters XII** SNK Playmore **Arcade**
05. **Ninja Blade** Microsoft **Xbox 360**
06. **Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep** Square Enix **PSP**
07. **Demon's Souls** Sony **PlayStation 3**
08. **Klonoa** Namco Bandai **Wii**
09. **Muramasa: The Demon's Blade** Marvelous **Wii**
10. **7th Dragon** Sega **Nintendo DS**

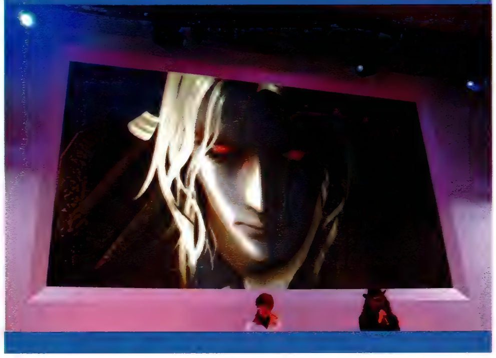
Top 10 Unplayable Games

01. **Castlevania** Konami **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360**
02. **Ryu ga Gotoku/Yakuza 3** Sega **PlayStation 3**
03. **Ni no Kuni: The Another World** Level-5 **Nintendo DS**
04. **Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII** Square Enix **PlayStation 3 & PSP**
05. **The 3rd Birthday** Square Enix **PSP**
06. **Ushiro** Level-5 **PSP**
07. **Quantum Theory** Tecmo **PlayStation 3**
08. **No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle** Marvelous **Wii**
09. **White Knight Chronicles** Sony **PlayStation 3**
10. **Tekken 6** Namco Bandai **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360**

Biggest Surprise Boxout

Castlevania Next-Gen

During a show positively silly with a distinct lack of surprise, Koji "IGA" Igarashi's announcement of a Castlevania in development for PS3 and 360 was the big (and only) jaw-dropper. Suggesting strongly the return of angst-ridden half-vampire hero Alucard, the 30-second teaser carried no hint of a release window.



Biggest Disappointment

Whither Team ICO?

For many—play editors included—the most anticipated reveal at TGS was meant to be Fumito "ICO" Ueda's PS3 game. Too bad it wasn't there. Sony Worldwide Studios head Shuhei Yoshida teased that an announcement was forthcoming "very soon" last August; let's hope we won't have too much longer to wait.

SHONEN JUMP
NARUTO
THE BROKEN BOND
ONLY ON XBOX 360
Relive the RIVALRY...
through BOTH of their eyes.
Play as Naruto, Sasuke, and others in an all-new ACTION ADVENTURE
The ONLY NARUTO console game you can play ONLINE
AVAILABLE NOW
SHONEN JUMP
THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR MANGA
viz media
NarutoXbox360Game.com
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence
UBISOFT

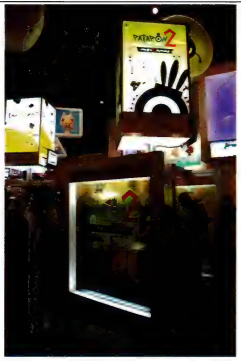
NARUTO: The Broken Bond video game © 2008 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Ubisoft, Ubi.com, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. NARUTO artwork and elements © 2002 MASASHI KISHIMOTO. All rights reserved. SHONEN JUMP and NARUTO are trademarks of Shueisha, Inc., in the U.S. and/or other countries. Published and distributed by Ubisoft Entertainment under license from VIZ Media LLC. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

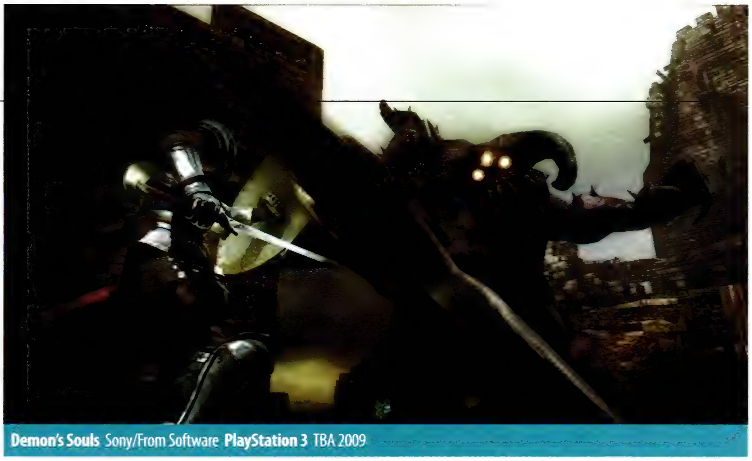
Jump in.

XBOX 360® LIVE

SONY

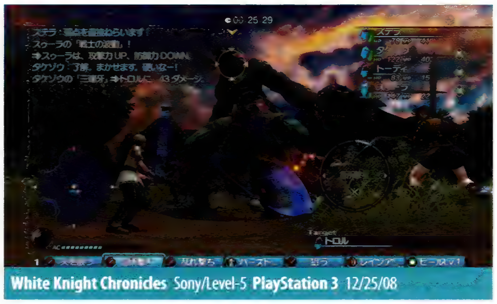
PlayStation



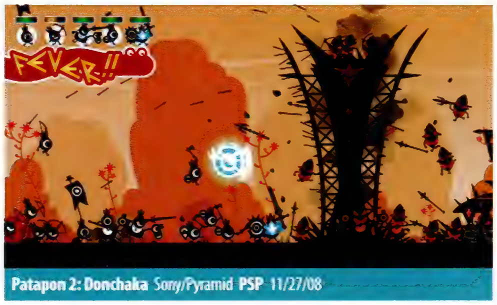


Demon's Souls Sony/From Software **PlayStation 3** TBA 2009

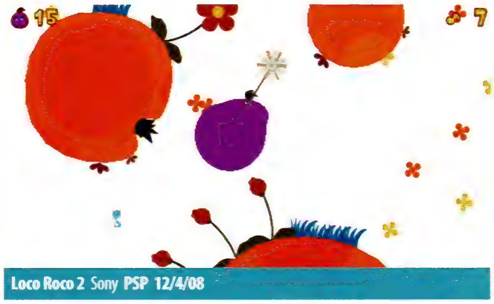
Sony needed to make a huge splash at TGS to help boost dismal PlayStation 3 sales. Unfortunately, they did not, showing only one new PS3 game and choosing to concentrate heavily on the new PSP-3000. That platform got a lot of love, including quirky sequels Loco Roco 2 and Patapon 2: Donchaka, and the hard boiled adventure game A Diamond and the Sound of a Gunshot. On the PS3 front, however, things were decidedly grim. The forthcoming PS3 title from Team ICO was not announced, and Sony's big December game, Level-5's White Knight Story, was showing only on video. This left the Oblivion-like third-person action RPG Demon's Souls by From Software to pick up the slack. It was an excellent game even in its early state, but could not hope to compete with Star Ocean: The Last Hope and The Last Remnant, across the way at Microsoft's booth. Sony's PSN lineup was a bit more robust, including the PlayStation Store exclusive PSP RPG Piposaru Senki, based on the Ape Escape series, That Game Company's poetic Flower, and the latest iteration of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's light-and-sound puzzler, Lumines Supernova.



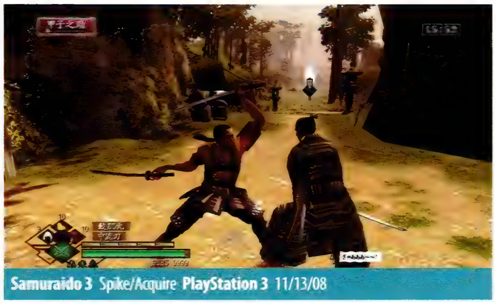
White Knight Chronicles Sony/Level-5 **PlayStation 3** 12/25/08



Patapon 2: Donchaka Sony/Pyramid **PSP** 11/27/08

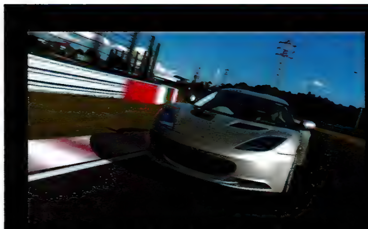


Loco Roco 2 Sony **PSP** 12/4/08

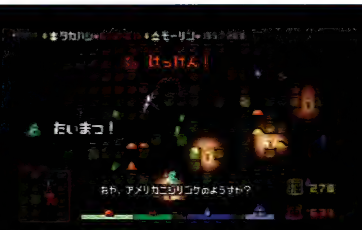


Samuraido 3 Spike/Acquire **PlayStation 3** 11/13/08

OTHER TITLES



Gran Turismo 5 Prologue Spec III Sony/Polyphony Digital **PlayStation 3** Available Now



You Sure Are Uppity For A Hero or2 Sony/Acquire **PSP** Available Now

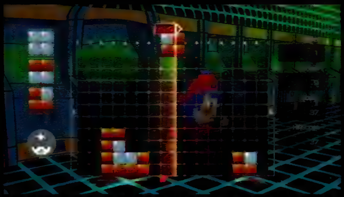
A Diamond and the Sound of a Gunshot Sony **PSP** Spring 2009

Bleach: Soul Carnival Sony **PSP** Available Now

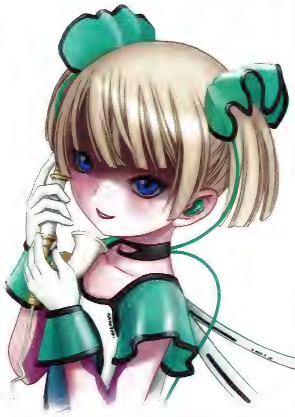
Piposaru Senki Sony **PSP** TBA

Flower — Sony/That Game Company — **PSN** — TBA 2009

Gomibako Sony **PSN** TBA 2009

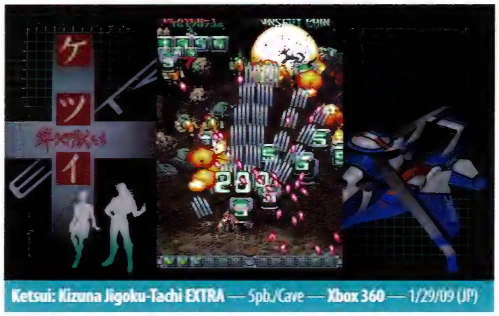


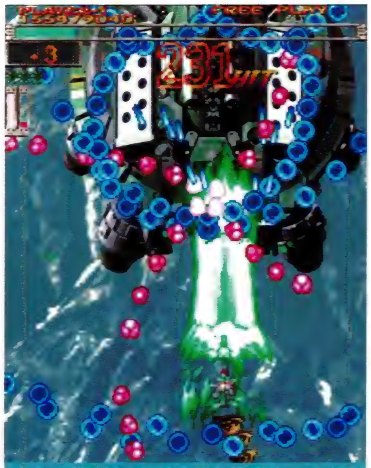
Lumines Supernova Q? Entertainment **PSN** TBA 2008

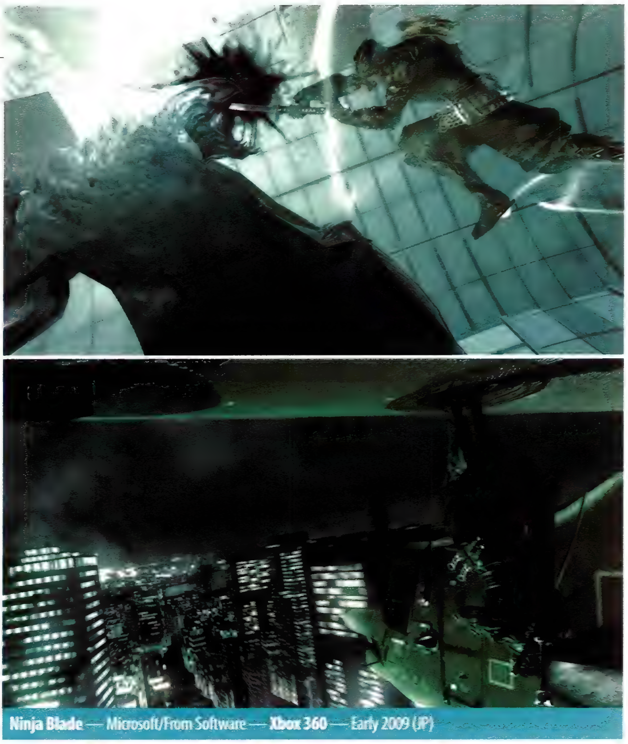


MICROSOFT

Microsoft had little of their own to show, preferring to let third party titles like Square Enix's Star Ocean: The Last Hope and The Last Remnant, Capcom's Resident Evil 5 and Street Fighter IV, and Sega's Sonic Unleashed do their work for them. Microsoft's lone new offering was the spectacularly beautiful Ninja Blade by From Software, a cinematic action game in the vein of From's own Otogi series. Also playable were the classical 2-D shooters Dodonpachi Dai-Ou-Jou: Black Label EXTRA and Ketsui: Kizuna Jigoku-Tachi EXTRA, both developed by Cave.

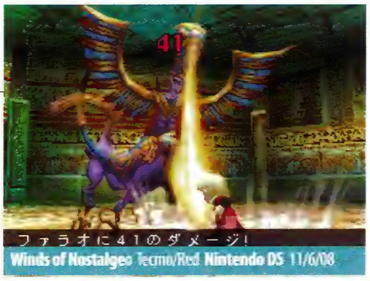

Ketsui: Kizuna Jigoku-Tachi EXTRA — 5pb./Cave — **Xbox 360** — 1/29/09 (JP)


Dodonpachi Dai-Ou-Jou: Black Label EXTRA — 5pb./Cave — **Xbox 360** — 12/25/08 (JP)

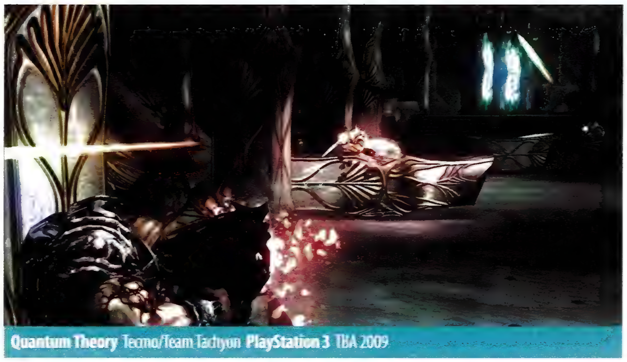

Ninja Blade — Microsoft/From Software — **Xbox 360** — Early 2009 (JP)

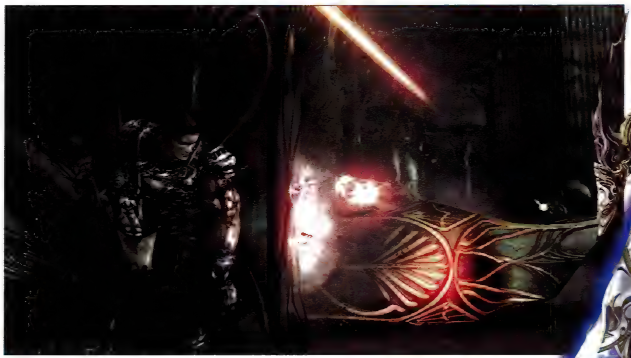
TECMO

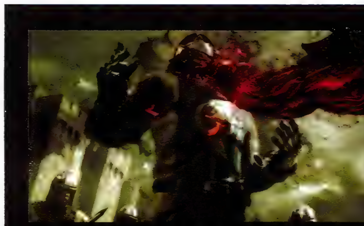
Newly Itagaki-less Tecmo seemed to have something to prove at TGS, having been recently embattled with takeover attempts by both Square Enix and Koei. The company's Team Tachyon showed Quantum Theory, a very early, Gears of War-meets-dark Japanese fantasy third person shooter for PlayStation 3, and Undead Knights, a Monster Hunter-style co-op action RPG for PSP. Rounding out the lineup was Winds of Nostalgeo for DS, a co-development with Matrix, the studio behind the DS versions of Final Fantasy III and IV, and Red, of Tengai Makyo and Sakura Taisen fame.



Winds of Nostalgeo Tecmo/Red **Nintendo DS** 11/6/08


Quantum Theory Tecmo/Team Tachyon **PlayStation 3** TBA 2009




Undead Knights Tecmo **PSP** TBA 2009

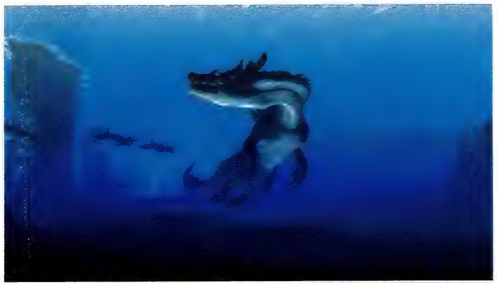
あの頃は確か…
月が真っ赤だったのを
Again: FBI Parapsychology Agent Tecmo/Cing **Nintendo DS** — Spring 2009

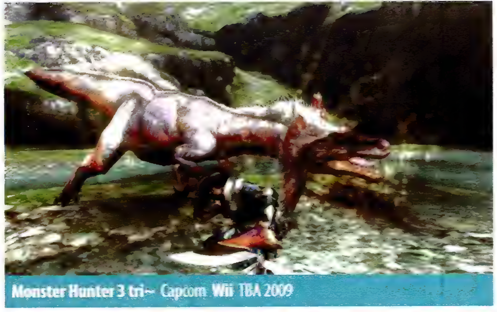
OTHER TITLES

TOKYO GAME SHOW
2008

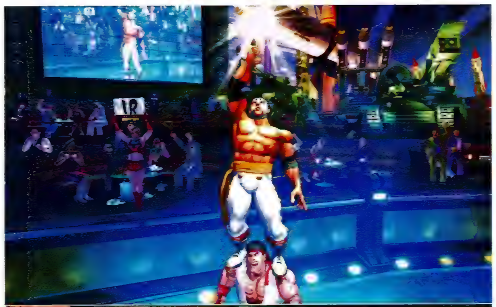
CAPCOM

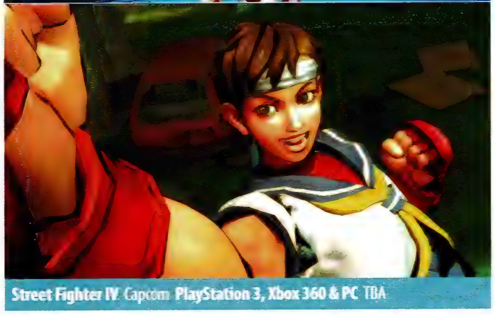
Capcom: The greatest Japanese third party on Earth. How can the fact be denied, when showgoers were faced with the triple majesty of our Game of Show, Resident Evil 5, a playable Sakura in the home versions of Street Fighter IV, and six hour long lines for Monster Hunter 3 tri~? The latter was easily the most popular game at TGS, despite being visually indistinguishable from its PS2 predecessors. Control, however, was another matter entirely: The Classic Controller will be supported in tri~, but the builds at the show had to be played with Wiimote and Nunchuck firmly in hand. Opinions were mixed; it remains to be seen if Monster Hunter fans used to pad control will jump on the waggle bandwagon. Unsurprisingly, Capcom's abundance of lower profile titles were nearly as exciting. The point-and-click spinoff Miles Edgeworth: Pro Prosecutor brings a much-needed breath of fresh air to the Ace Attorney series, Tatsunoko VS. Capcom for Wii was already looking arcade perfect, and Fate/unlimited codes, based on the anime/manga/novel/PC multimedia series of the same name, drew huge lines. Not all was rosy, however—the Wii port of Dead Rising looked dismal.



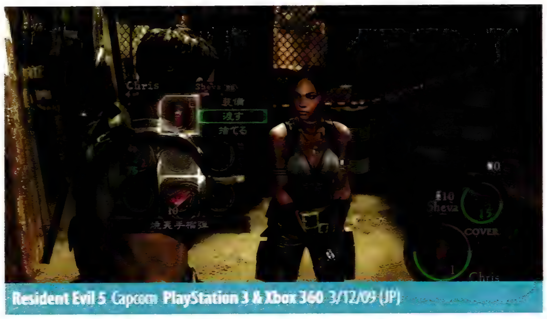


Monster Hunter 3 tri~ Capcom **Wii** TBA 2009

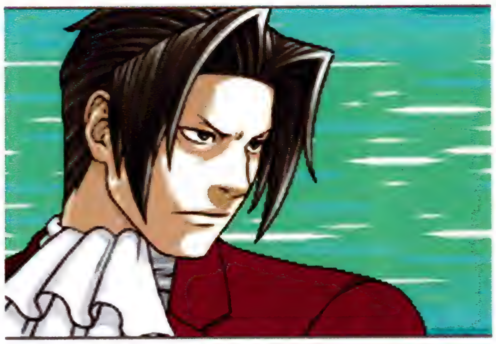




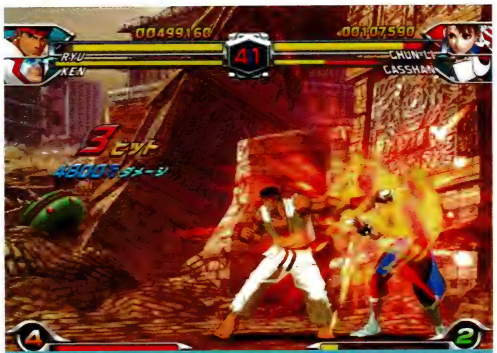
Street Fighter IV Capcom **PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 & PC** TBA



Resident Evil 5 Capcom **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** 3/12/09 (JP)



Miles Edgeworth: Pro Prosecutor Capcom **Nintendo DS** Spring 2009



Tatsunoko VS. Capcom: Cross Generation of Heroes Capcom/8ing **Wii** 12/11/08

OTHER TITLES

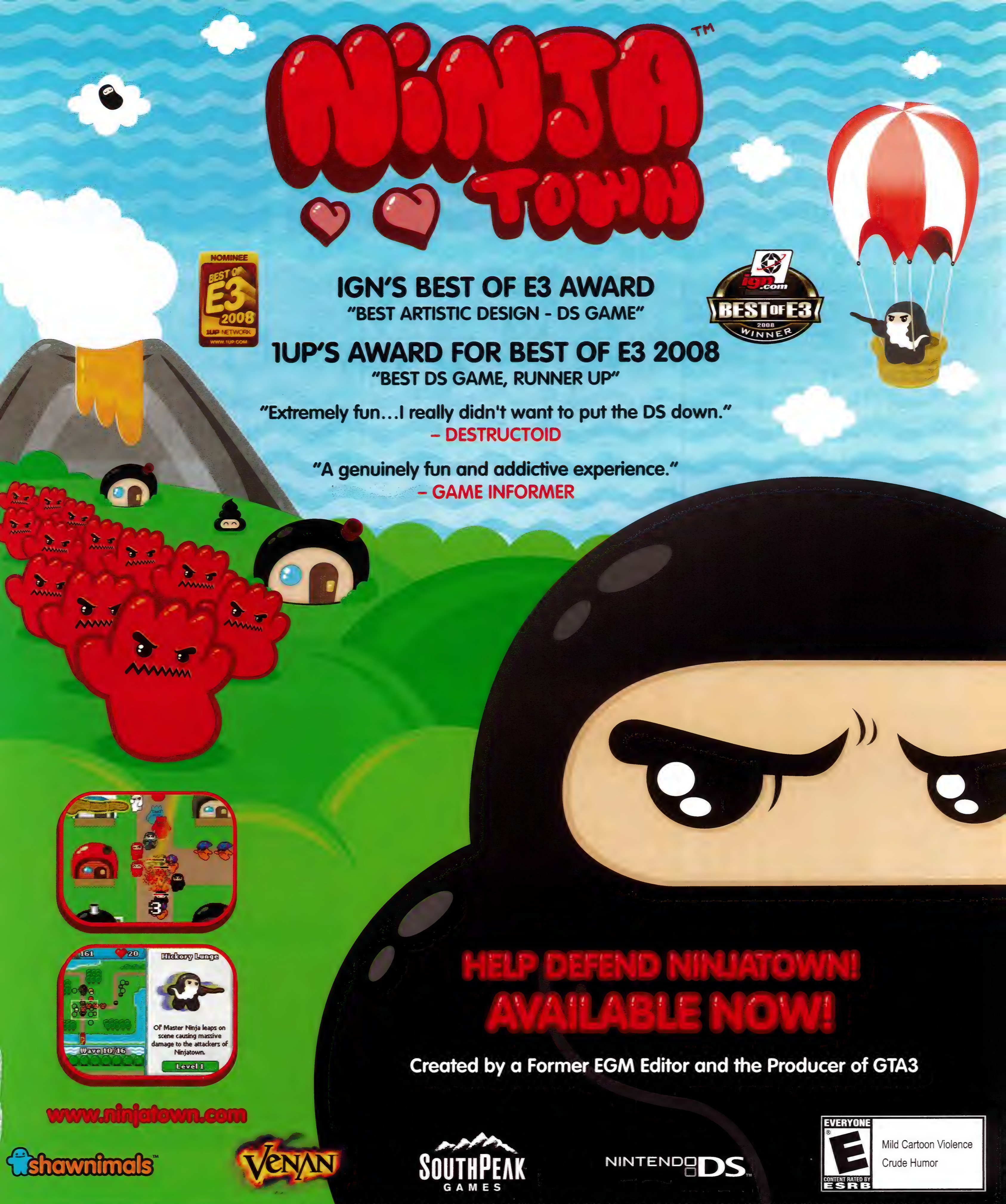
TIME
65
Lancer
Berserker
6 HIT!

Fate/unlimited codes Capcom/8ing/TYPE-MOON **PlayStation 2** 12/18/08

Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop Capcom **Wii** February 2009

Sengoku Basara Battle Heroes Capcom **PSP** Spring 2009

Mega Man Star Force 3 Black Ace & Red Joker Capcom **Nintendo DS** 11/13/08


NINJA TOWN™
NOMINEE
BEST OF E3 2008
1UP NETWORK
WWW.1UP.COM
ign.com
BEST OF E3
2008
WINNER
161
20
Hickory Lunge
Wave 10/16
Level 1
3

IGN'S BEST OF E3 AWARD
"BEST ARTISTIC DESIGN - DS GAME"

1UP'S AWARD FOR BEST OF E3 2008
"BEST DS GAME, RUNNER UP"

"Extremely fun…I really didn't want to put the DS down."
– DESTRUCTOID

"A genuinely fun and addictive experience."
– GAME INFORMER

Ol' Master Ninja leaps on scene causing massive damage to the attackers of Ninjatown.

HELP DEFEND NINJATOWN!
AVAILABLE NOW!

Created by a Former EGM Editor and the Producer of GTA3

www.ninjatown.com

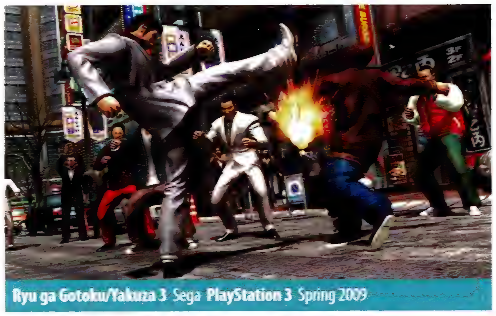
shawnimals™ VENAN SOUTHPEAK GAMES NINTENDO DS™

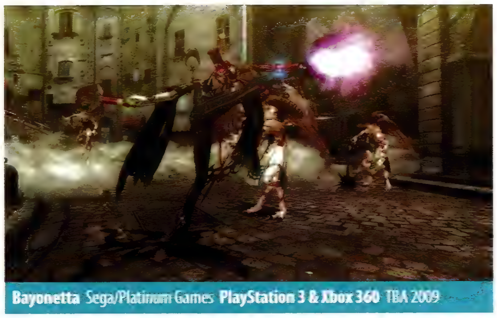
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Cartoon Violence
Crude Humor

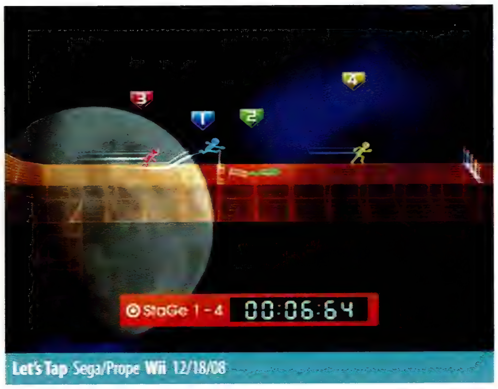
NINTENDO DS IS A TRADEMARK OF NINTENDO. COPYRIGHT © 2008 SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE CORPORATION. "SOUTHPEAK", "SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE", "SOUTHPEAK GAMES" AND THEIR RELATED LOGOS ARE TRADEMARKS OR REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NINJATOWN CHARACTERS AND ELEMENTS ARE TRADEMARKS OF SHAWNIMALS LLC © 2008.

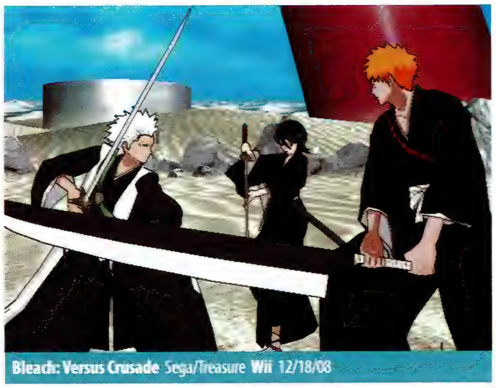
SEGA

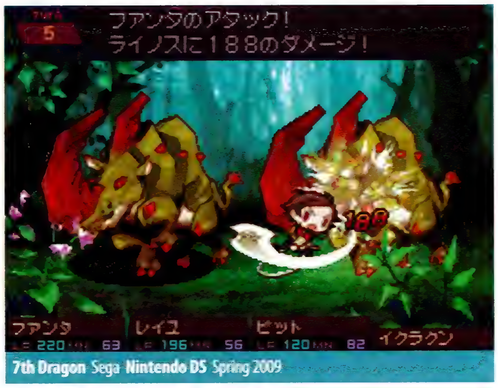
Most improved Japanese developer? Sega, unquestionably. With titles like Valkyria Chronicles and Ryu ga Gotoku Kenzan! released in 2008, it's hard to believe the company was a virtual laughingstock just two short years ago. The downward spiral has now been decisively reversed, as proven by their incredibly well rounded lineup at TGS. The gangster adventure Ryu ga Gotoku/Yakuza 3 looked miraculous, especially when one considers that its development team released the previous game in the series only six short months ago. Bleach: Versus Crusade for Wii delivered on Treasure's reputation for licensed games far better than they have any right to be, while Yuji Naka's Let's Tap purported to be the first game in history controlled without actually touching an input device: You must rest your Wiimote on a cardboard box, then drum on its surface to play. On the DS front, Phantasy Star creator Rieko "Phoenix Rie" Kodama debuted Seventh Dragon, her Nintendo DS collaboration with Kazuya Niinou of Etrian Odyssey fame, to much old-school otaku acclaim. Spiritual cousin Phantasy Star 0, shown directly opposite, is already a candidate for most visually impressive DS game of all time. In addition to Sega's own in-house works, the two games by Hideki Kamiya and Shinji Mikami's Platinum Games—Bayonetta for HD consoles and Infinite Space for DS—showed that even though the duo may no longer have Capcom's development clout behind them, they can still craft world-class entertainment experiences.

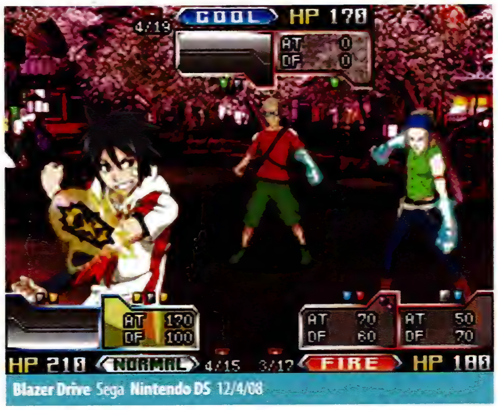

Ryu ga Gotoku/Yakuza 3 Sega **PlayStation 3** Spring 2009

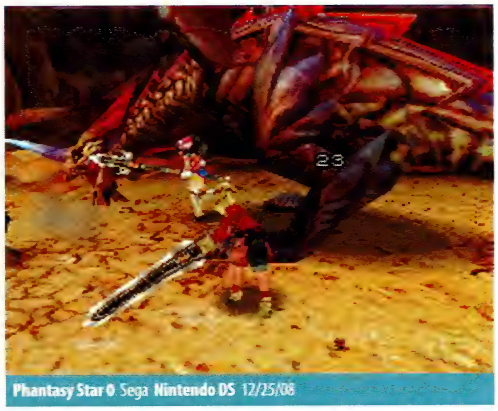

Bayonetta Sega/Platinum Games **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** TBA 2009


StaGe 1-4
00:06:64
Let's Tap Sega/Prope **Wii** 12/18/08

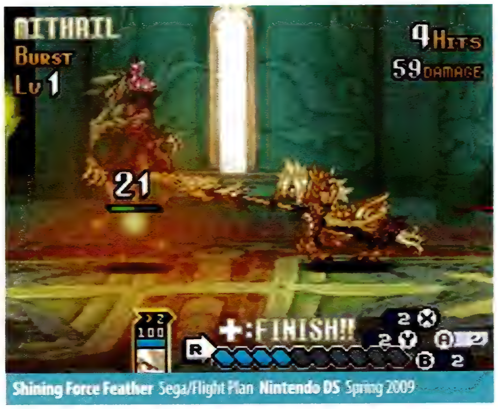

Bleach: Versus Crusade Sega/Treasure **Wii** 12/18/08

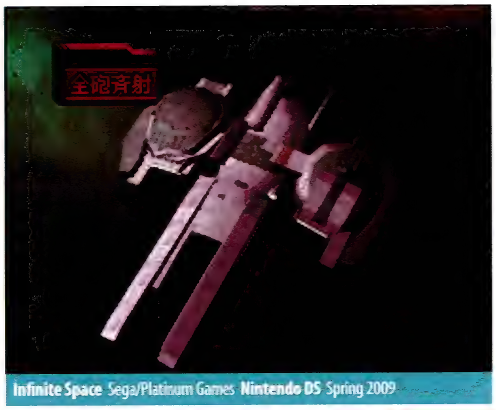

5
ファンタのアタック！
ライノスに188のダメージ！
188
ファンタ 220 63
レイユ 196 56
ヒット 120 82
イクラクン
7th Dragon Sega **Nintendo DS** Spring 2009


COOL
HP 178
AT 0
DF 0
AT 170
DF 100
AT 70
DF 60
AT 50
DF 70
HP 218
NORMAL
FIRE
HP 188
Blazer Drive Sega **Nintendo DS** 12/4/08

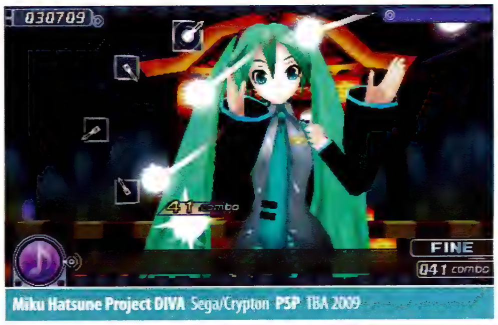


Phantasy Star 0 Sega **Nintendo DS** 12/25/08


MITHRIL
BURST
Lv 1
9 HITS
59 DAMAGE
21
+:FINISH!!
Shining Force Feather Sega/Flight Plan **Nintendo DS** Spring 2009



Infinite Space Sega/Platinum Games **Nintendo DS** Spring 2009


030709
41 combo
FINE
041 combo
Miku Hatsune Project DIVA Sega/Crypton **PSP** TBA 2009

NVIDIA
SLI™
READY
80 PLUS
140mm
3 YEAR
OCZ Technology
WARRANTY
OCZ
MODXSTREAM-PRO
POWER SUPPLY
700W
MODXSTREAM-PRO
POWER SUPPLY

PUTTING THE "PRO" BACK IN POWER!

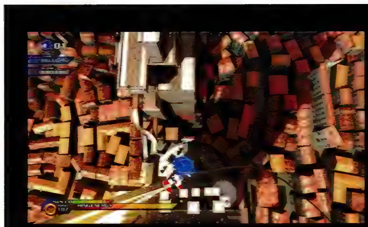
The ModXStream Pro, a superior gaming-grade power supply, delivers the ultimate combination of OCZ's cutting-edge PSU architecture and an efficient modular cable management system.

OCZ Technology
ocztechnology.com

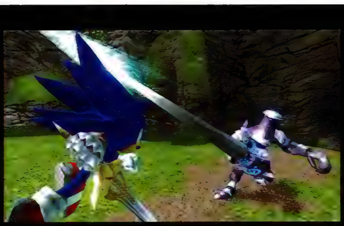
OCZ Technology Inc.
860 E. Arques Ave.
Sunnyvale, CA 94085 USA
(408) 733-8400 Phone
(408) 733-5200 Fax
(408) 733-8400 Sales

Available at:
amazon.com
buy.com
circuitcity.com
clubit.com
compusa.com
dandh.com
dell.com

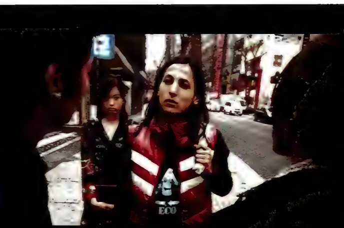
SEGA cont.



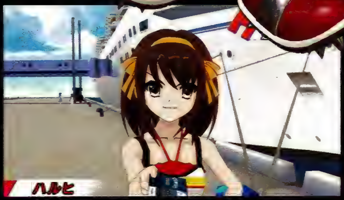
Sonic Unleashed Sega **PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 & Wii** 12/18/08



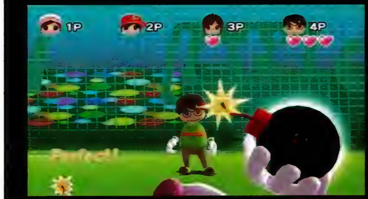
Sonic and the Black Knight Sega **Wii** Spring 2009



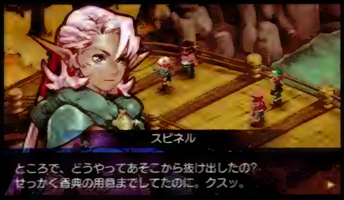
428 Sega/Chunsoft **Wii** 12/4/08



Haruhi Suzumiya Side By Side Sega **Wii** 3/26/09

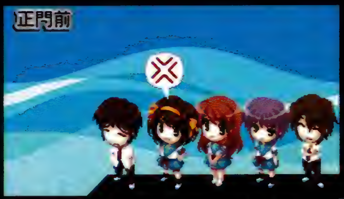


Let's Catch Sega/Prope **WiiWare** 12/16/08

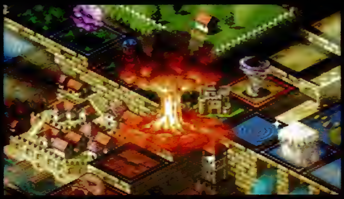


ところで、どうやってあそこから抜け出したの？
せっかく香典の用意までしてたのに。クスッ。

Garnet Chronicle Sega/Ironnos **PSP** Available Now



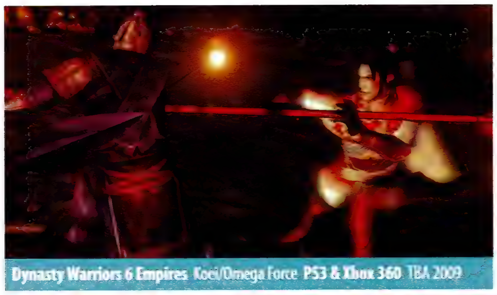
Haruhi Suzumiya In Line Sega **Nintendo DS** 3/26/09



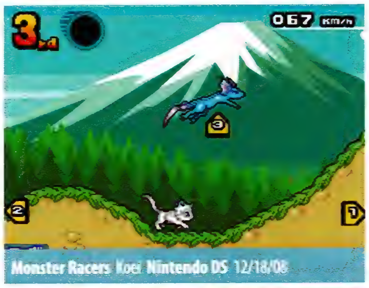
Culdcept DS Sega/Omiya Soft **Nintendo DS** Available Now

OTHER TITLES

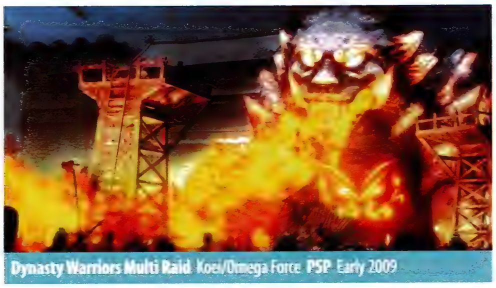
KOEI



Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires Koei/Omega Force **PS3 & Xbox 360** TBA 2009



Monster Racers Koei **Nintendo DS** 12/18/08

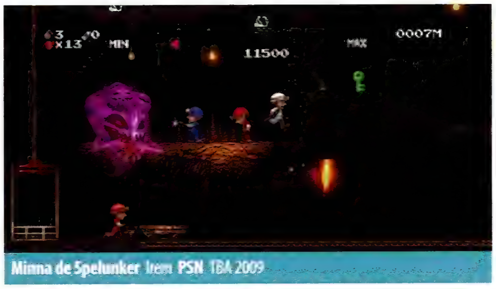


Dynasty Warriors Multi Raid Koei/Omega Force **PSP** Early 2009

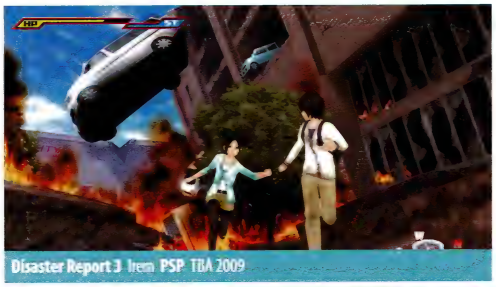
Every TGS I hope Koei will graduate from being the Dynasty Warriors factory, and every TGS I am disappointed. No fewer than three "new" retreads were playable at the show: The RTS re-skin Dynasty Warriors 6 Empires, a port of Warriors Orochi 2 for PSP, and Monster Hunter-esque PSP spinoff Dynasty Warriors Multi Raid.

IREM

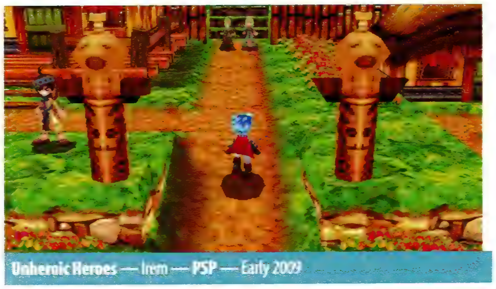
Irem, our favorite little Japanese developer that could, furthered their reputation for exclusive Sony love by showing earthquake adventure sequel Disaster Report 3 and pastel RPG Unheroic Heroes, both for PSP, as well as a high definition remake of retro classic Spelunker (!) to be distributed on PSN.



Minna de Spelunker Irem **PSN** TBA 2009



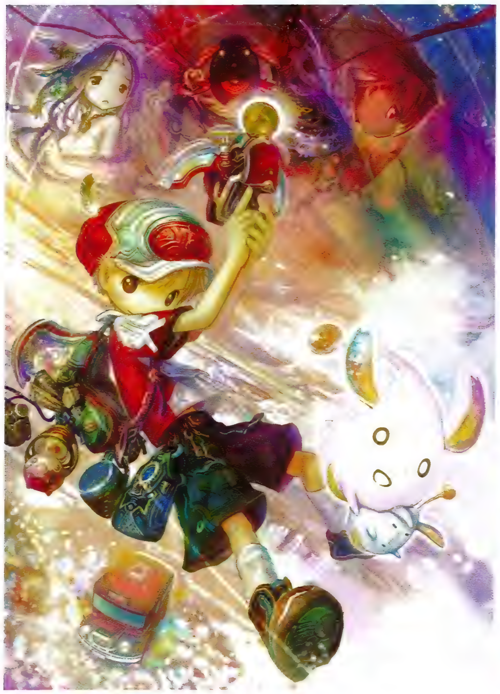
Disaster Report 3 Irem **PSP** TBA 2009

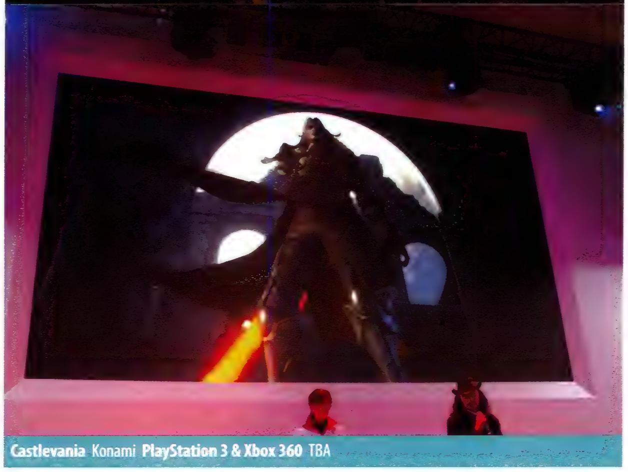


Unheroic Heroes — Irem — **PSP** — Early 2009

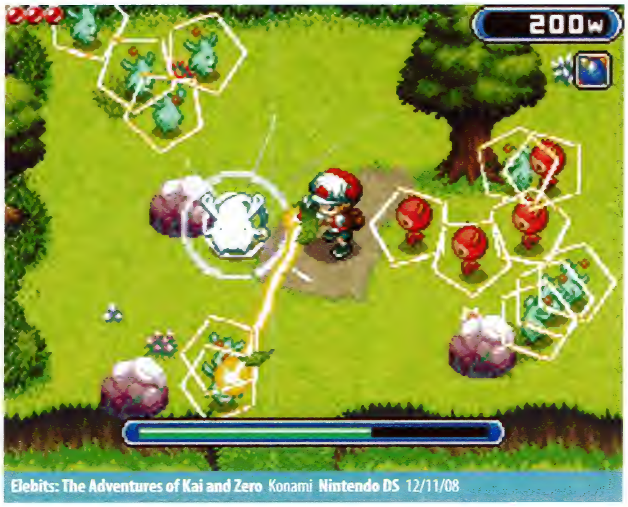
KONAMI

Castlevania producer Koji "IGA" Igarashi saved an otherwise yawn-worthy show by casually dropping two bombs. One: Solid details for the Castlevania Hollywood movie, to be directed by Stomp the Yard helmer Sylvain White. Two: A next-gen Castlevania for PlayStation 3 and 360, apparently starring Alucard. A mere 30 seconds of footage were shown, but everyone's favorite emo hero has never looked better. As for when the game might manifest, your guess is as good as ours... but isn't it reassuring just knowing a console 'Vania is on its way? Konami's more tangible offerings were perfectly pleasant, including Otomedius Gorgeous, a side scrolling spiritual sequel to the Parodius series, and the beautifully hand drawn Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero on DS. Throngs gathered to see this year's update of Pro Evolution Soccer and a shameless Animal Crossing clone called Little Magician's Magic Adventure, but Konami's biggest push was for Suikoden Tierkreis. The long-awaited sequel sported almost unthinkably high production values for a handheld game, with lengthy anime FMV and plentiful fully voiced cutscenes. Remarkably, Tierkreis will launch in Japan and America almost simultaneously this December... but something tells me Western fans won't be getting the luxurious $200 special edition.

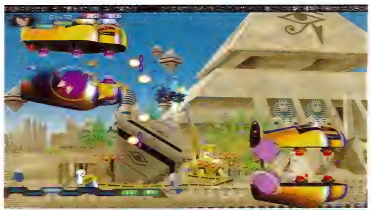




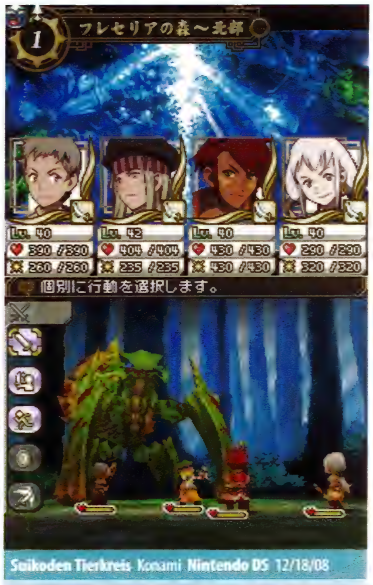
Castlevania Konami **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** TBA



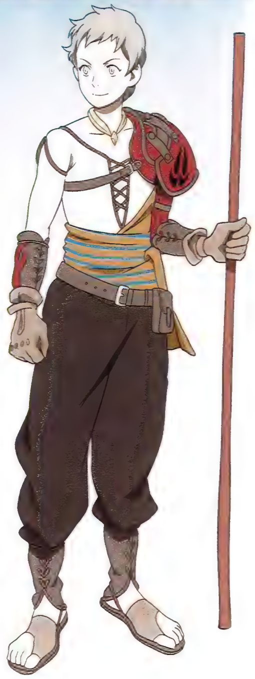
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero Konami **Nintendo DS** 12/11/08

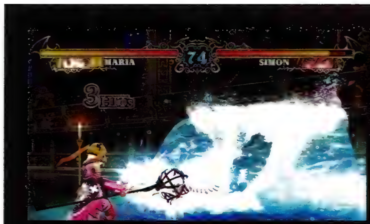


Otomedius Gorgeous Konami **Xbox 360** 11/20/08

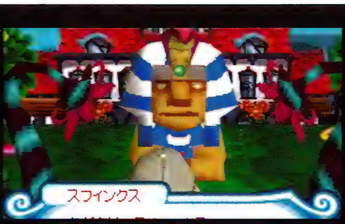


Suikoden Tierkreis Konami **Nintendo DS** 12/18/08

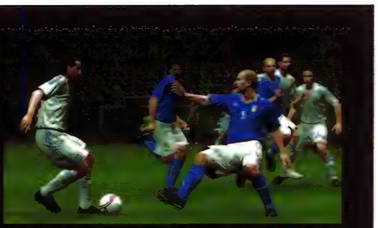




Castlevania Judgment Konami **Wii** 1/15/08

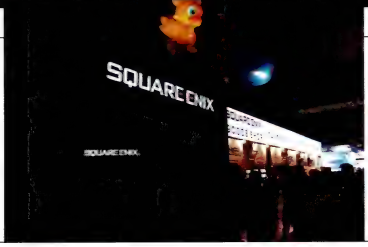


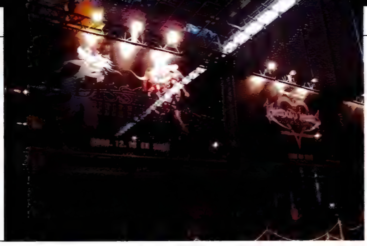
Little Magician's Magic Adventure Konami **Ninendo DS** 11/13/08



Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 Konami **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** 11/27/08

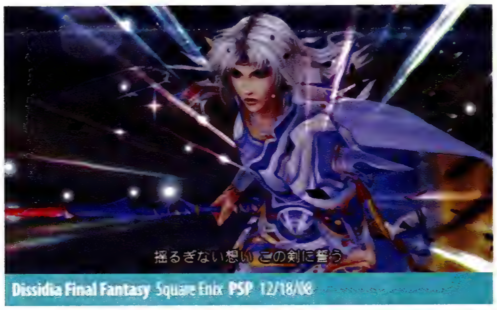
OTHER TITLES



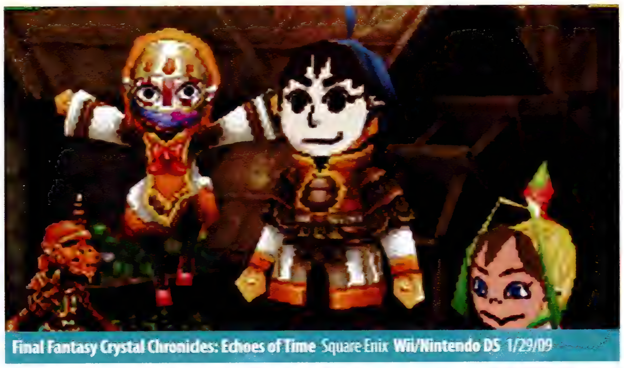


SQUARE ENIX

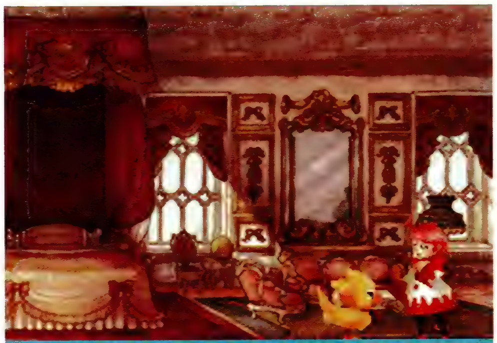
Square Enix's main TGS attraction, Star Ocean: The Last Hope, was truly a thing of beauty. Developer tri-Ace may have struck out with Infinite Undiscovery, but have no fear that its flagship series' next-gen debut will be anything less than astonishing. Star Ocean's Final Fantasy XIII-level visuals and searing action battles—not to mention a tangible release date—caused many to declare it their Game of Show, though we felt Capcom's one-two RE5/SFIV punch barely edged it out of the top slot. Of course, S-E had much more to show, the most exciting being a trio of PSP games: Parasite Eve sequel The 3rd Birthday, Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep, and "Final Fantasy All Stars" title Dissidia. All three looked incredible, with the latter two fully playable... which is more than can be said for Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII, once again shown only via brief video snippets. Dragon Quest IX fared better, with an impressive in-game trailer that revealed a completely revamped, command-driven RPG—a far cry from the action-based affair so decried by series fans at its debut.



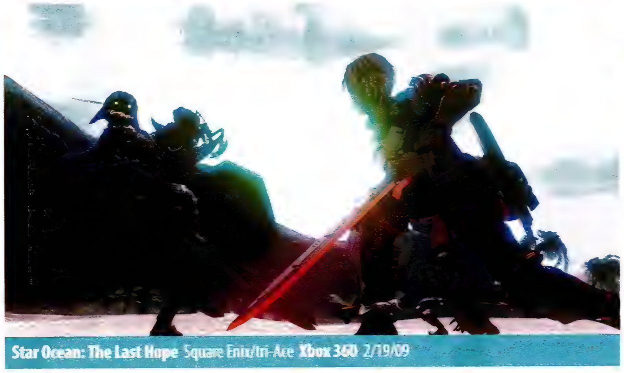
Dissidia Final Fantasy Square Enix **PSP** 12/18/08



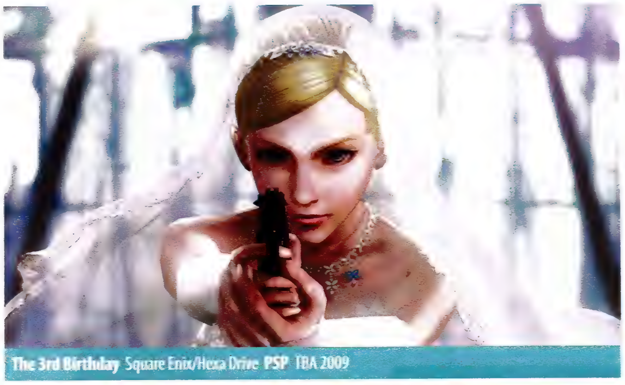
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time Square Enix **Wii/Nintendo DS** 1/29/09



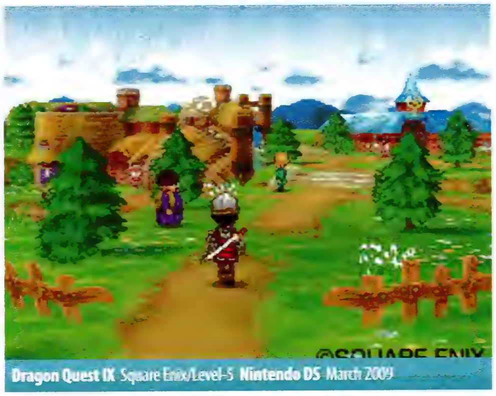
Chocobo & The Magical Storybook: The Witch, the Girl, and the Five Sages Square Enix **Nintendo DS** 12/11/08 (JP)



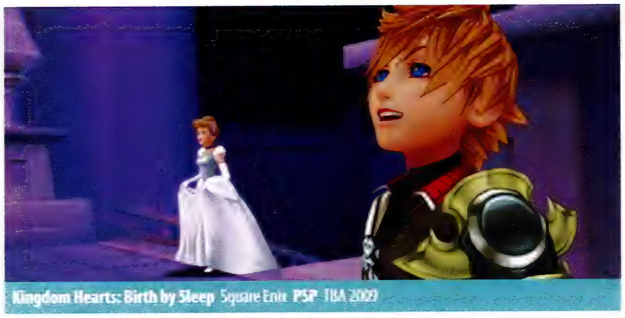
Star Ocean: The Last Hope Square Enix/tri-Ace **Xbox 360** 2/19/09



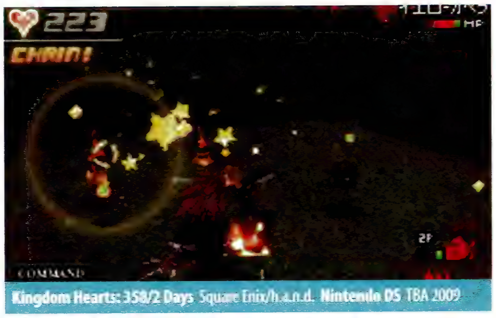
The 3rd Birthday Square Enix/Hexa Drive **PSP** TBA 2009



Dragon Quest IX Square Enix/Level-5 **Nintendo DS** March 2009

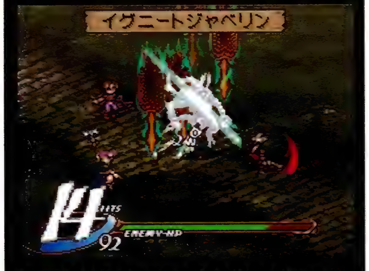


Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep Square Enix **PSP** TBA 2009

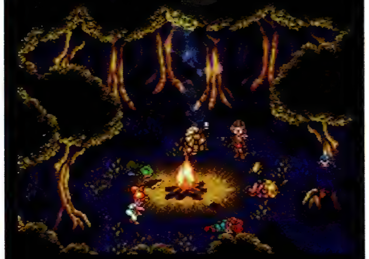


Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days Square Enix/h.a.n.d. **Nintendo DS** TBA 2009

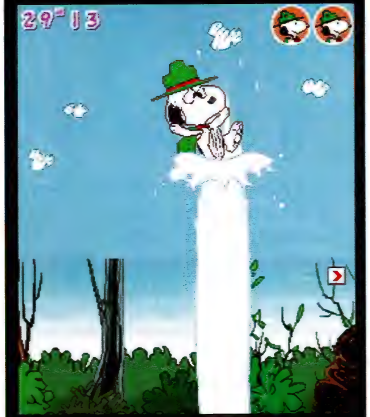
OTHER TITLES



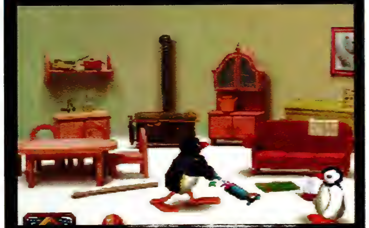
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume Square Enix/tri-Ace **Nintendo DS** Available Now



Chrono Trigger Square Enix **Nintendo DS** 11/20/08



Snoopy DS Square Enix **Nintendo DS** Available Now

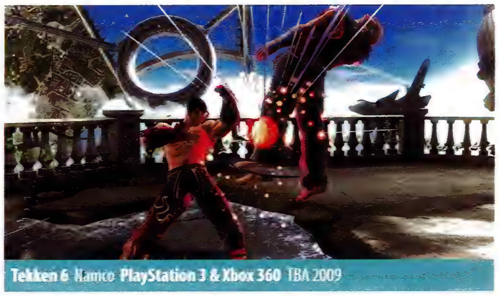


Pingu's Wonderful Carnival! Square Enix **Nintendo DS** Available Now

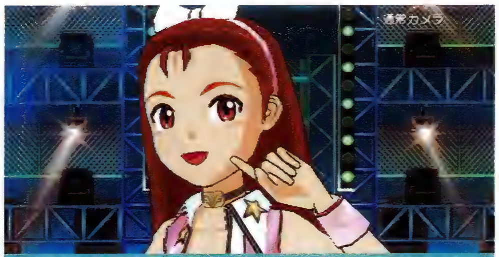
BANDAI NAMCO

BANDAI NAMCO
Games

The Namco half of Bandai Namco has been through difficult times recently, having experienced the underperformance of several key franchises on high def consoles. The developer is growing wary of next-gen development, according to company COO Shin Unozawa; accordingly, there were only a handful of PS3 and 360 titles at their booth. Tekken 6 was recently announced for both PS3 and 360, though only video was shown, and Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2 looked much better than its predecessor, but will curiously also be released on PS2 (!). Fortunately, Namco was showing a pair of superb looking Wii titles: A remake of the cult classic PSone platformer Klonoa, and an ethereal post-apocalyptic RPG known as Fragile. Klonoa, in particular, looked wonderful, and a noticeable lack of waggle did the series' legacy justice. On handhelds, Namco showed a propensity for multiple editions: Reworked PSP ports of its mega-popular The iDOLM@STER vocal sim games came in three flavors, while the in-house-developed Tales of Hearts will be available in both CG FMV and anime FMV variations. At the other end of the booth, Bandai touted its usual lineup of licensed products: The surprisingly good Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam VS. Gundam and Macross Ace Frontier for PSP, late-cycle PS2 games like Dragon Ball Z: Infinite World, and the amusing rubber monster fighting game Daikaiju Battle. None of the above, however, could compare to the cel shaded triumph that is CyberConnect2's Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm.


Tekken 6 Namco **PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** TBA 2009

Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology 2 Namco/Tales Studio/Alfa System **PSP** 1/29/09


The iDOLM@STER SP: Perfect Sun, Wandering Star & Missing Moon Namco/Project iM@S **PSP** 1/22/09

Macross Ace Frontier Bandai **PSP** Available Now

風のクロノア
door to phantomile
Klonoa Namco **Wii** 12/4/08

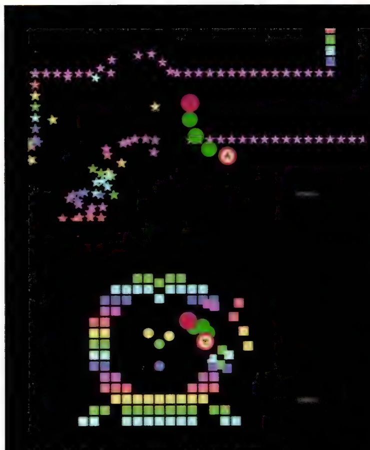
Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam VS. Gundam Bandai **PSP** 11/20/08

Fragile Namco **Wii** 1/22/09

Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2 Bandai/Koei/Omega Force **PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3 & Xbox 360** 12/18/08

Tales of Hearts: Anime Movie Edition & CG Movie Edition Namco/Tales Studio **Nintendo DS** 12/11/08

BANDAI NAMCO cont.

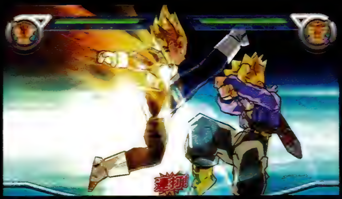


Noby Noby Boy Namco **PSN** TBA 2009

The Sky Crawlers: Innocent Aces Namco/Project Aces **Wii** Available Now

We Ski & Snowboard Namco **Wii** 11/13/08

Taiko Drum Master Wii Namco **Wii** 12/11/08

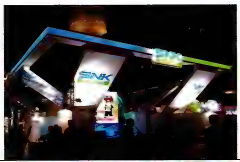


Dragon Ball Z: Infinite World Bandai **PlayStation 2** 12/4/08

Mobile Suit Gundam 00: Gundam Meisters Bandai **PlayStation 2** Now Available

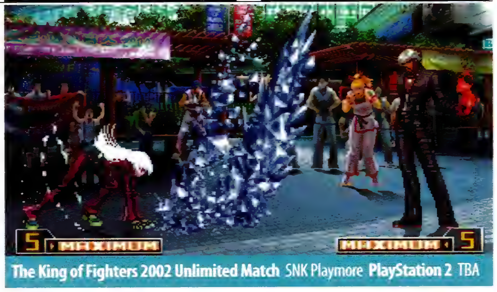
Daikaiju Battle: Ultra Coliseum Bandai **Wii** Now Available

OTHER TITLES

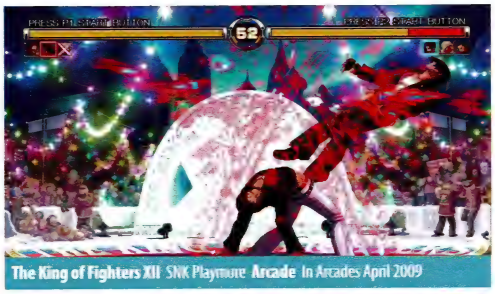


SNK PLAYMORE

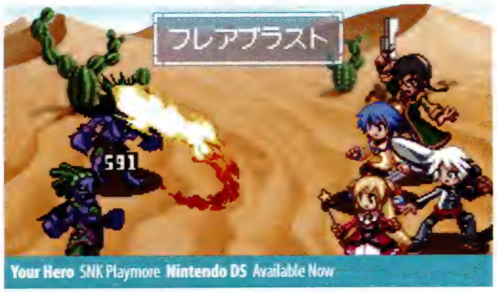
The King of Fighters XII: It's a wonderful thing that a developer is willing to spend three years drawing a high definition 2-D fighting game from scratch. For the fighting game aficionado displeased with SFIV's polygons, KoFXII is your game; let's hope the arcade version will receive PS3t360 ports sometime next year. In addition to various Neo•Geo compilations, SNK was also showing The King of Fighters 2002 Unlimited Match, a significantly enhanced PS2 update of the much-lauded KoF2002, with a total of 66 playable characters and the addition of an all-new fighter called Nameless.



The King of Fighters 2002 Unlimited Match SNK Playmore **PlayStation 2** TBA



The King of Fighters XII SNK Playmore **Arcade** In Arcades April 2009

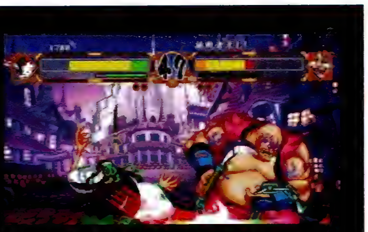


Your Hero SNK Playmore **Nintendo DS** Available Now

CHALLENGER!
60
CHALLENGER!

The King of Fighters 98 Ultimate Match SNK Playmore **Xbox Live Arcade** TBA 2009

ADK Soul SNK Playmore/ADK **PlayStation 2** 12/18/08

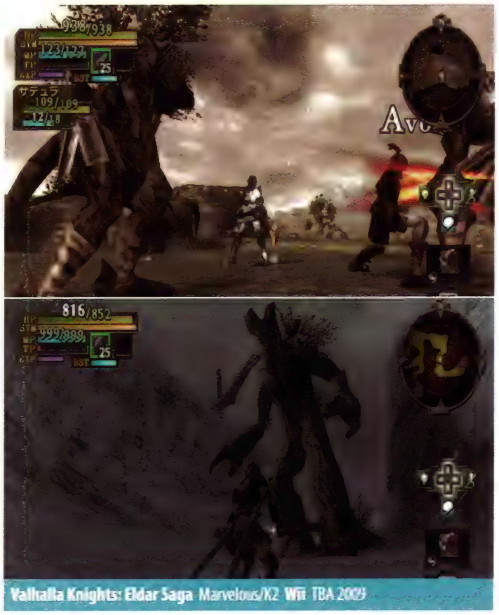


Samurai Spirits Rokuban Shoubu SNK Playmore **PSP** TBA 2009

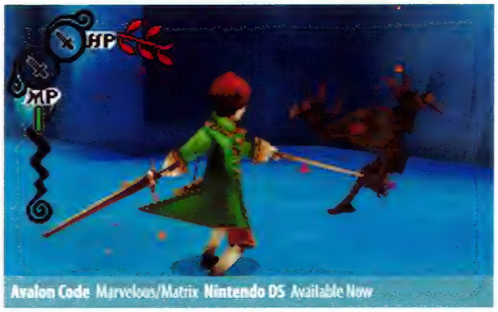
OTHER TITLES

MARVELOUS

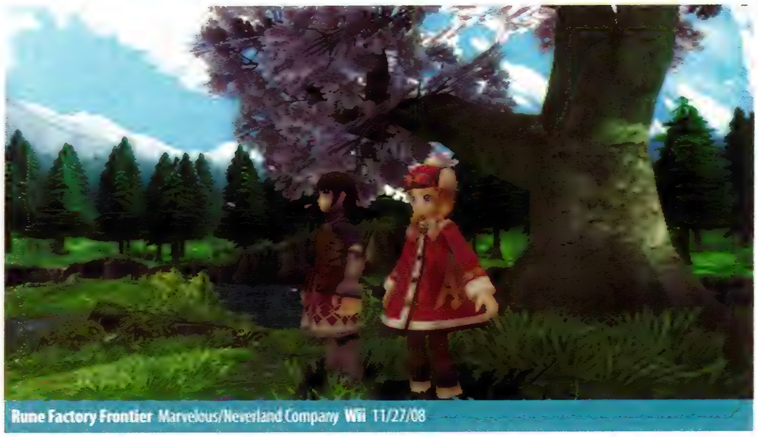
Marvelous is playing it safe: Every single one of their upcoming games is for DS or Wii. Thankfully, the company isn't following the path so many other Nintendo third parties have taken, instead choosing to bring relatively traditional genres to the two lightweight platforms. Marvelous's biggest newsmaker at TGS was Suda 51's No More Heroes 2: Desparate Struggle, shown only in teaser video form with no release date announced. Playable Wii offerings included Vanillaware's shockingly gorgeous Muramasa: The Demon Blade, formerly known as Oboro Muramasa Yotoden and now confirmed as an action RPG, and Image Epoch's Arcrise Fantasia, the first large-scale original Wii RPG. Two games in the Harvest Moon series will also be coming to Wii: Harvest Moon: Waku Waku Animal March and Rune Factory Frontier. The long-in-development Little King's Story continued to be puzzling but promising, while the PSP action RPG series Valhalla Knights jumped ship to Nintendo in the form of Valhalla Knights: Eldar Saga. Marvelous's DS lineup was similarly strong, with Matrix's fabulous action RPG Avalon Code, Harvest Moon: Wind Bazaar, and mega-popular franchise PostPet all playable.



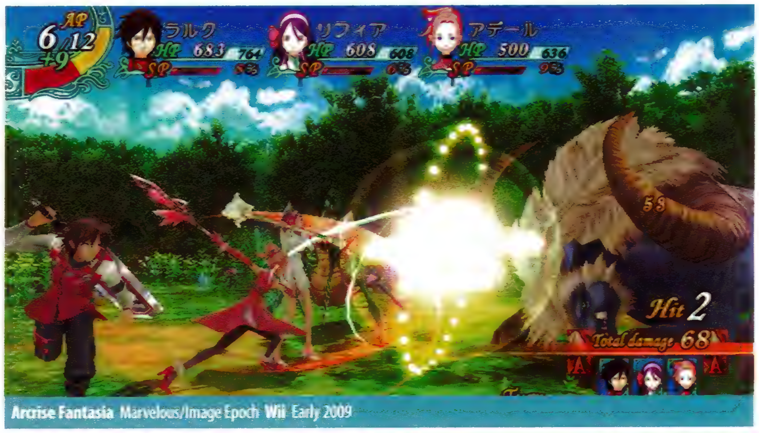
Valhalla Knights: Eldar Saga Marvelous/K2 **Wii** TBA 2009



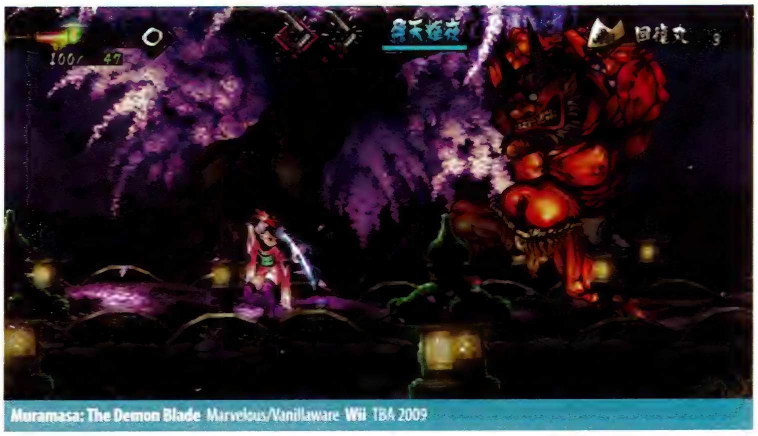
Avalon Code Marvelous/Matrix **Nintendo DS** Available Now



Rune Factory Frontier Marvelous/Neverland Company **Wii** 11/27/08

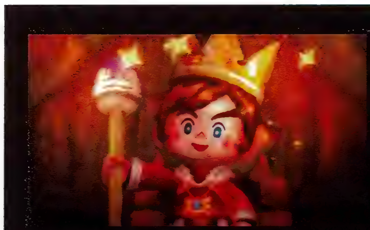


Arcrise Fantasia Marvelous/Image Epoch **Wii** Early 2009



Muramasa: The Demon Blade Marvelous/Vanillaware **Wii** TBA 2009

OTHER TITLES



Little King's Story Marvelous **Wii** TBA 2009

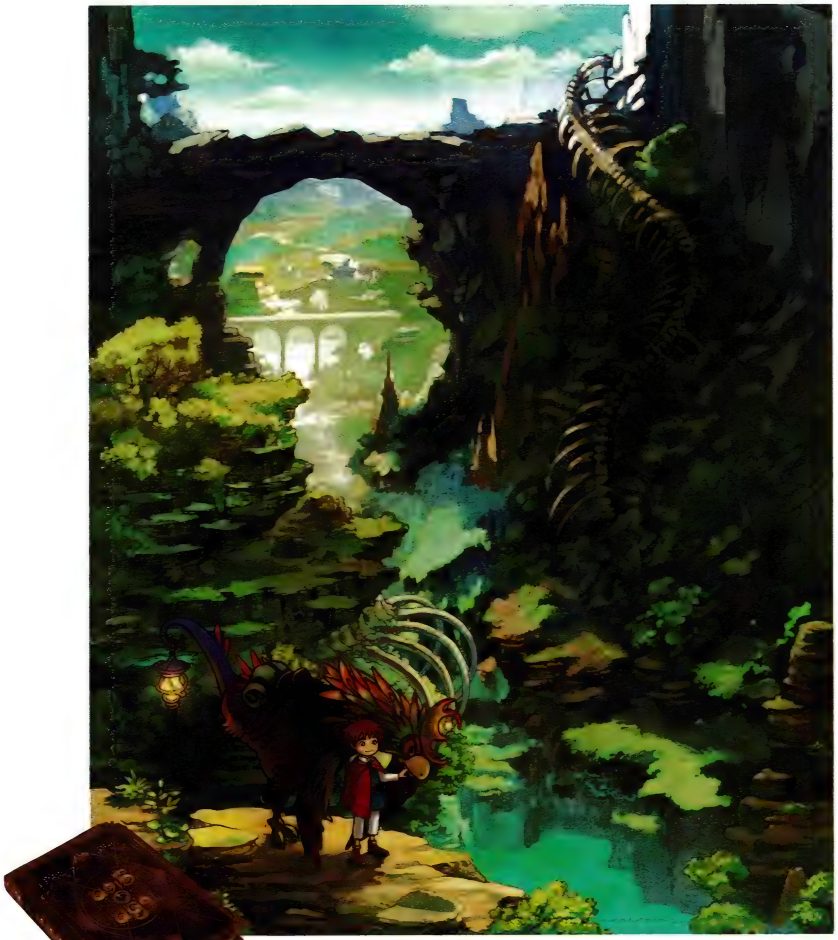
Harvest Moon: Waku Waku Animal March Marvelous **Wii** Now Available

Reborn! Forbidden Delta of Darkness Marvelous **Wii/PlayStation 2** Now Available

Ikki Tousen: Eloquent Fist Marvelous **PSP** Now Available

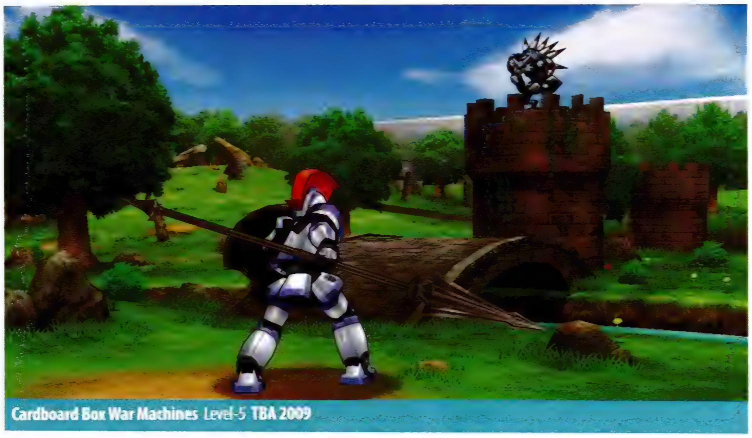
Harvest Moon: Wind Bazaar Marvelous **Nintendo DS** 12/18/08

PostPet DS Marvelous **Nintendo DS** TBA 2009

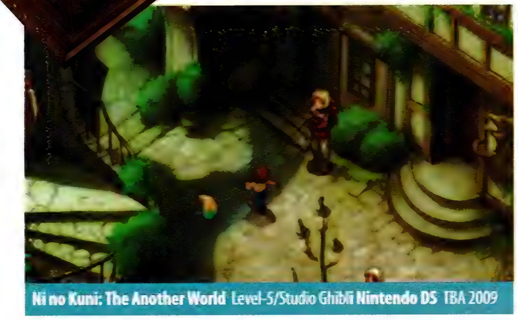


LEVEL 5

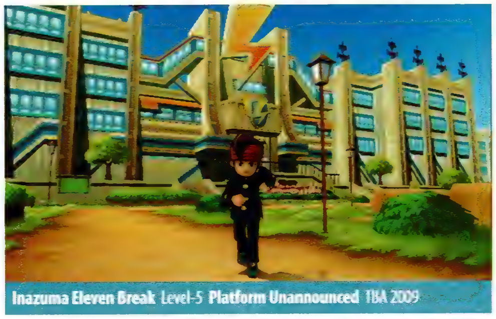
Level-5 has grown in recent years from respected RPG developer to respected—and financially successful—multi-genre publisher. In only their second year of self-publishing, Level-5 debuted no less than eight new games, all of which looked worth getting excited about. At the top of the heap is Ni no Kuni: The Another World, a collaboration with none other than Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli—something Japanese industry pundits have long claimed was impossible, given Miyazaki's famous distrust of video games. Typically Ghibli-gorgeous, Ni no Kuni will come with a giant, hardbound book inscribed with stylus runes necessary to play the game when it is released some time next year. On PSP, the horror RPG Ushiro looked absolutely incredible, and the Mega Man Star Force-esque Cardboard Box War Machines appeared promising. For DS, Level-5 will release Inazuma Eleven 2, a quick sequel to last month's soccer RPG, and Professor Layton will undertake his third and final adventure. The company's only console game was announced for an unknown platform (our money's on Wii)—Inazuma Eleven Break.



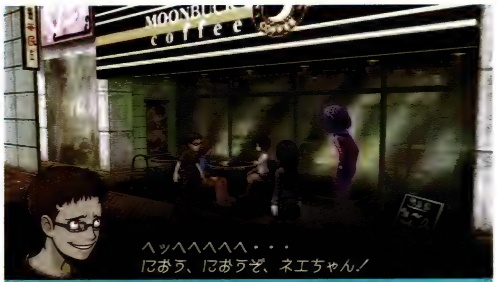
Cardboard Box War Machines Level-5 **TBA 2009**



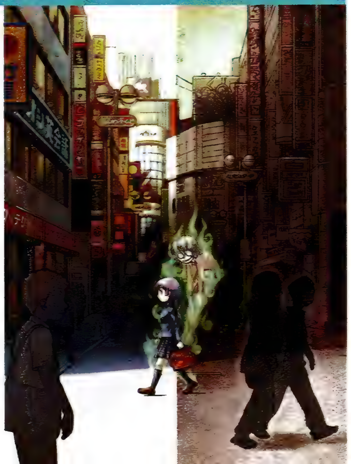
Ni no Kuni: The Another World Level-5/Studio Ghibli **Nintendo DS** TBA 2009



Inazuma Eleven Break Level-5 **Platform Unannounced** TBA 2009



Ushiro **Level-5** PSP **TBA 2009**



OTHER TITLES

Inazuma Eleven 2 Level-5 **Nintendo DS** TBA 2009

Professor Layton and the Final Journey Through Time Level-5 **Nintendo DS** 11/27/08

Sloane and MacHale's Mysterious Stories **Nintendo DS** TBA 2009

HOW MUCH
OF A GOOD THING
IS TOO MUCH?

YEAH...STUPID QUESTION

FUSION PUBLISHING PRESENTS
GIRLS OF GAMING VOL. 6

DIGITAL AND PRINT EDITIONS ON SALE
HOLIDAY 2008

FOR DETAILS, SPECIAL OFFERS,
AND INFORMATION ON HOW TO ORDER
VISIT US ON THE WEB AT
THEGIRLSOFGAMING.COM

FEATURING 3D!

girls
of
gaming 6

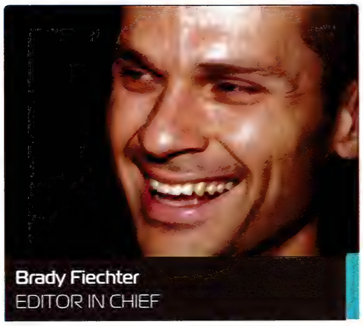
play

REVIEWS

December 2008

Dave Halverson
PUBLISHER

Modus Operandi: I don't take reviewing games lightly—no siree. I get deep into a game in accord with the audience the developer is aiming to gratify, and then review from that perspective with an eye on design, artistry, animation, attention to detail, physics, audio, and functionality.
Brain Drain: Today was a very, very good day. After the rush of Mirror's Edge and wonder of Tomb Raider Underworld I was feeling pretty great, and then today gaming took the giant leap forward I've been waiting far too long for. Afro Samurai is the first game that's Mature, because it's actually mature, like the series it's based on. I'm tired of the double standard between film and games. If we can have that guy blown in half on the Call of Duty 4 page, we can have a genuine game of Afro Samurai. I am content.
Game of the Month: All of the above.

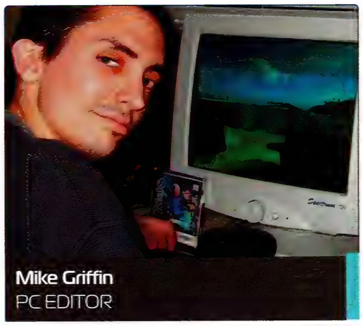


Brady Fiechter
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Modus Operandi: There is no checklist for reviewing a game. The best game feels right from the start, and the best game is not concerned with feature sets as much as how each component is handled. If the visual space is not compelling in some way, the gameplay better be so good that it's Tetris (which offers an incredibly interesting visual space).
Brain Drain: In the spirit of the holiday, I'd like to give thanks to the fact that Mirror's Edge was made. I'm going to assume that wasn't such an easy task. And to Crystal Dynamics for having a good sense of what Tomb Raider has always been about. And to all you indie developers, thanks for a great year!
Game of the Month: Tomb Raider: Legend

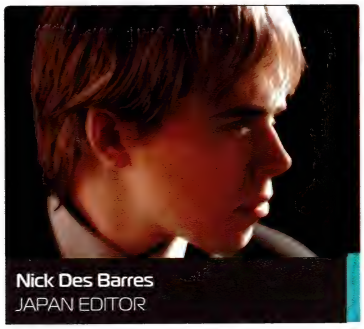
Greg Orlando
SENIOR EDITOR

Modus Operandi: Here's the way of it: a game can be fun, but not good, and good, but not fun. The two really are mutually exclusive; if it wasn't the case, Mutant League Football would score a 12 out of 10 and Silent Hill 2 would score a 4 out of 14. Thank god Play eliminated its scores. Also, Greg is counting the days until the installation of Reviewatron 4125, which will finally be able to suggest that fans of the genre should, in fact, like a particular game while all others should try before they buy—in 10 different languages!
Brain Drain: One year, and I am not making this up, my mom gave out pencils for Halloween. How our house was not egged to the Stone Age is a miracle not unlike the virgin birth.
Game of the Month: Forumwarz



Mike Griffin
PC EDITOR

Modus Operandi: I'm looking for convincing themes I can feel and considered polish I can respect, regardless of a game's scope or platform. I absolutely believe that games can be considered art, and a lot of great art requires a technical understanding of the canvas, instruments and stage. That's a balance I care about in a medium whose MO is interactivity. Interface is also very important to me, as it can crucially impede or compliment the flow of ideas that a game is attempting to communicate. **Brain Drain:** I'm clearly getting more mileage out of DLC than the retail channel. Yeah, as a heavy PC player the Steam option makes it incredibly easy, but I'm talking about Live, PSN and WiiWare too. With releases like Geometry Wars 2, BC: Reloaded, Ikaruga, LostWinds, World of Goo, Castle Crashers, Wipeout HD, Braid, etcetera… downloadable games owned in '08.
Game of the Month: Wakfu



Nick Des Barres
JAPAN EDITOR

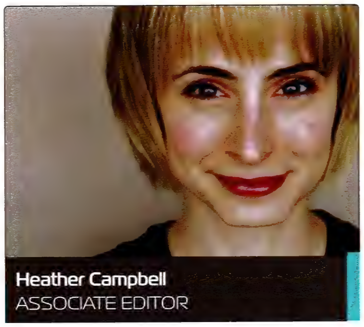
Modus Operandi: Hideo Kojima may not agree with me, but I believe videogames can be art. Although I have been writing about them for 14 years, never have I felt comfortable assigning numerical scores; there exist no universal, pan-human criteria against one can judge works of art. The most a critic can aspire to is describing, with as much eloquence as he can muster, how the work in question makes him feel. That is my goal when I review a game. **Brain Drain:** Namco Bandai recently held a web survey that indicated an American release for Klonoa on Wii (gnarly!), but the company also seemed keen to ruin the floppy-eared critter's character design (bogus!). Responders got to select their preference: The Klonoa we know and love, or an "edgy", Americanized, capless Klonoa with "'tude". Fans undoubtedly made the right choice; let's hope Namco listened.
Game of the Month: Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia

Casey Loe
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Modus Operandi: I couldn't be happier that we've done away with review scores. It's ridiculous to believe that there's some objective standard of quality that covers the opinions of every person who plays games. That said, I will miss dishing out the 3.5s, because a good reaming just isn't the same without some arbitrarily low score at the end.
Brain Drain: If the average gamer really is 35-40 years old, as industry-sponsored surveys claim, why release 80% of the major games in October and November? Game publishers—either start spacing out your releases, or admit that your surveys are skewed by 50-year olds playing Minesweeper at work and that the industry is still driven by Christmas presents for children.
Game of the Month: Fable 2

Eric L. Patterson
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Modus Operandi: I come from the angle that games can always be fixed and/or improved in some way, that games should be about making the player happy, not the developer, and if a game is multiplayer, it should be online, period. I'll forgive a game's flaws if it is an enjoyable experience, but I wish the small user-centered details weren't so often overlooked.
Brain Drain: After the "brain drain" that was putting together my first ever cover story (and cover story layout), I sit on the eve of another freetime-killer: Wrath of the Lich King. Wonderful. Oh, and for shame to Konami for taking the heavenly bliss that is Pop'n Music and turning it into the horror that is Beat'n Groovy. Why must great Japanese games be so terribly Americanized?
Game of the Month: See: front cover



Heather Campbell
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Modus Operandi: Games are a journey, and should be covered like travel journalism. It's more important to know how a game affects you than to provide a list of options it features on its menu screen. The number of guns, the types of vehicles, the variety of locations—these are bullet points for the back of the box. I'll tell you if it made me feel.
Brain Drain: Jumping should be included in every action game that features a bipedal avatar. Even if the game does not have platformer elements, there should be a button to press to make your character hop. Jumping is the primary element of fun in a game, plain and simple. More games should be made about/featuring jumping. Jump for the future of games. Jump!
Game of the Month: Mother 3 Fan Translation

System: Xbox 360, PS3, PC | **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal | **Publisher:** Ubisoft | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** Now

Far Cry 2

Freedom isn't free.

words Casey Loe

> "You'll spend most of your time dealing with a never-ending stream of pointless, unrealistic random encounters that are more of an annoyance than a challenge."

Far Cry 2's African savannah is a sight for sore eyes. Its windswept grasslands and flood-carved canyons are the perfect antidote to the gritty warehouses and sci-fi military battlegrounds in nearly every other FPS. The 20 square miles of Africa in Far Cry 2 offer a vast and beautiful cross-section of the continent, and players will be making new discoveries even after dozens of hours of play. You could hijack a jeep and drive its narrow dirt and grassy planes for hours, just looking for wildlife or watching the sun rise and set. At least, *theoretically* you could, if you didn't have to stop every 30 seconds to deal with the randomly generated packs of idiots who ram you with their own jeep for no apparent reason and then unload on you with their machine guns. So you use your own mounted machine gun to blow them away—they rarely bother to dodge—repair your jeep, and drive another few hundred yards, where more randomly generated idiots in a different-colored jeep do the exact same thing. Cut through them to reach a guard checkpoint, where you'll have to blow away another half-dozen of them, hiding in some abandoned shantytown. It's sort of fun to kill them the first time, but after you stop at a shop or safe house a half mile down the road, you won't be having so much fun when the checkpoint guards you killed two minutes ago are suddenly alive again.

The freedom of an open-world structure comes at a cost, which is the loss of the carefully crafted level design found in more linear games. In this case, the random, unscripted action that replaces it is lousy—you'll spend most of your time dealing with a never-ending stream of pointless, unrealistic random encounters that are more of an annoyance than a challenge (until a lucky fluke kills you and forces you to repeat them all over again). When you actually do reach the site of a mission in Far Cry 2, things pick up a bit, but the game continues to compensate for weak AI by having enemies shamelessly cheat. You kill one guy, and every soldier within a mile will be firing at your exact location a half second later. So you back up into a building and shoot the idiots from the doorway as they charge like lemmings towards you, and each soaks up five or six shots each before they even bother to stumble. But while enemies don't have a lot of interesting tactics, your hero does—he can charge in with guns blazing, sneak in with silenced weapons, or start fires that spread through enemy encampments, incinerating soldiers who are too stupid to run.

Far Cry 2's locales are diverse and interesting, and feature plenty of things to do. You can hunt for diamonds, liberate safe houses, raid weapon convoys to boost the stock of local arms merchants, or pursue intricate missions for competing factions in a bloody civil war. I would recommend Far Cry 2 to any shooter fan whose primary concern is length—I'm sure you could stretch the campaign mode out to 50 or 60 hours if you were determined to find and do *everything*. Unfortunately, Far Cry 2's random encounters will wear thin after only a few hours, and even its more involved missions will soon blur together due to the lack of variety in enemies and tactics. The African setting, some cool vehicles, and the interesting buddy system provide some great surprises over the course of Far Cry 2's single-player campaign, but not enough to make up for the drudgery of its combat.

parting **shot**

Far Cry 2 is an interesting game set in **a spectacular** sandbox, but an abundance of poorly-designed random encounters make exploring it a chore.

System: Xbox 360, (PS3 to follow) | **Developer:** Square Enix | **Publisher:** Square Enix | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** November 20, 2008

The Last Remnant

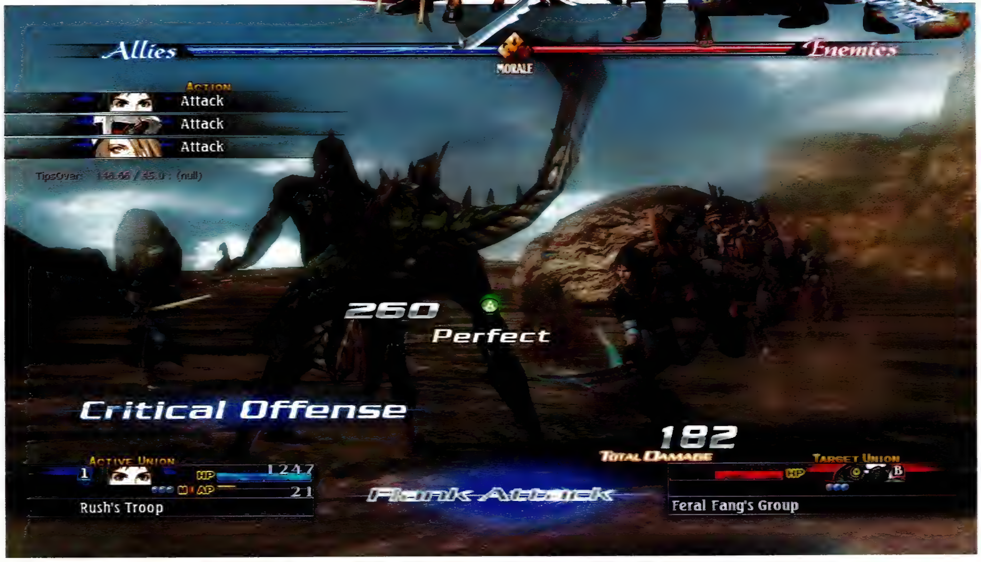
Don't Get Siked Out

words Heather Campbell

When Square Enix president Yoichi Wada recently announced that he was worried about the Japanese gaming industry, I wonder if he was talking from first-hand experience. Has the president played recent S-E titles, and do they give him cause for concern?

As I wrote a couple months ago, Infinite Undiscovery was a disappointment. Since the game was developed by Tri-Ace, I didn't really let its failings phase me; I trust Square Enix because it's the company of Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior. Few titles are worthy of blind faith, but both FF and DW are games which inspire admiration, regardless of whether or not you're a fan of the JRPG genre. Even if you don't dig turn-based battle games with lengthy cut-scenes, you can look at a Final Fantasy game and understand there's an loving attention to design and detail.

As much as I want to -- really want to -- *love* The Last Remnant, there's a sort of cheap mediocrity to much of the game that prevents me from celebrating its release. Let me clarify: The music is great, and the character designs (especially on your non-human comrades) are really fantastic. I wish western games looked and sounded like this.



But the animation is sometimes *terrible*. Is it the engine? If so, I don't want another Unreal Engine Square Enix game. It's distractingly rough, and stands out like a sore thumb when juxtaposed against such effortless character design. And the voice acting that I was so looking forward to (after my controlled demo of the game at Square Enix's Los Angeles office) falls apart very quickly. Again, a message to game companies: You must start hiring SAG voice actors and WGA script editors. There is so much money being risked on these games; to cut corners on such obvious elements as voice over and localization does your games a great disservice.

The battle system in Last Remnant is by far the best part of the title. In a way, it's the Game of the game; the rest could be seen as a long, menu-heavy interactive DVD. Unions of three or more characters function like individual units on large, expansive battlefields. Because the characters in each union base their combat on broad terms, it's a little like window-dressing on individual party members. To put it another way, if these were just single characters instead of unions of unknown troops, there wouldn't be much lost except for the sense of scale.

Finally, I'll add that there are some very welcome changes to the JRPG formula in Last Remnant in terms of the traditional conceits of the genre. For example, travelling the overworld is done by selecting a city or location -- bang, you're there. Man, is that nice. Another small and welcome shift is the ability to save any time; something these games should have been doing for the last ten years.

parting shot

Playing this and Fallout 3 in the same month clarified what I want from RPGs -- something exactly in the middle of both of them. Remnant is not a bad game; it's much better than Infinite Undiscovery, for example. But it's not evolved enough to be a great one. It's more like getting to see the in-between steps of a genre shifting towards a new horizon.

Information
Dillmoor
Alert:

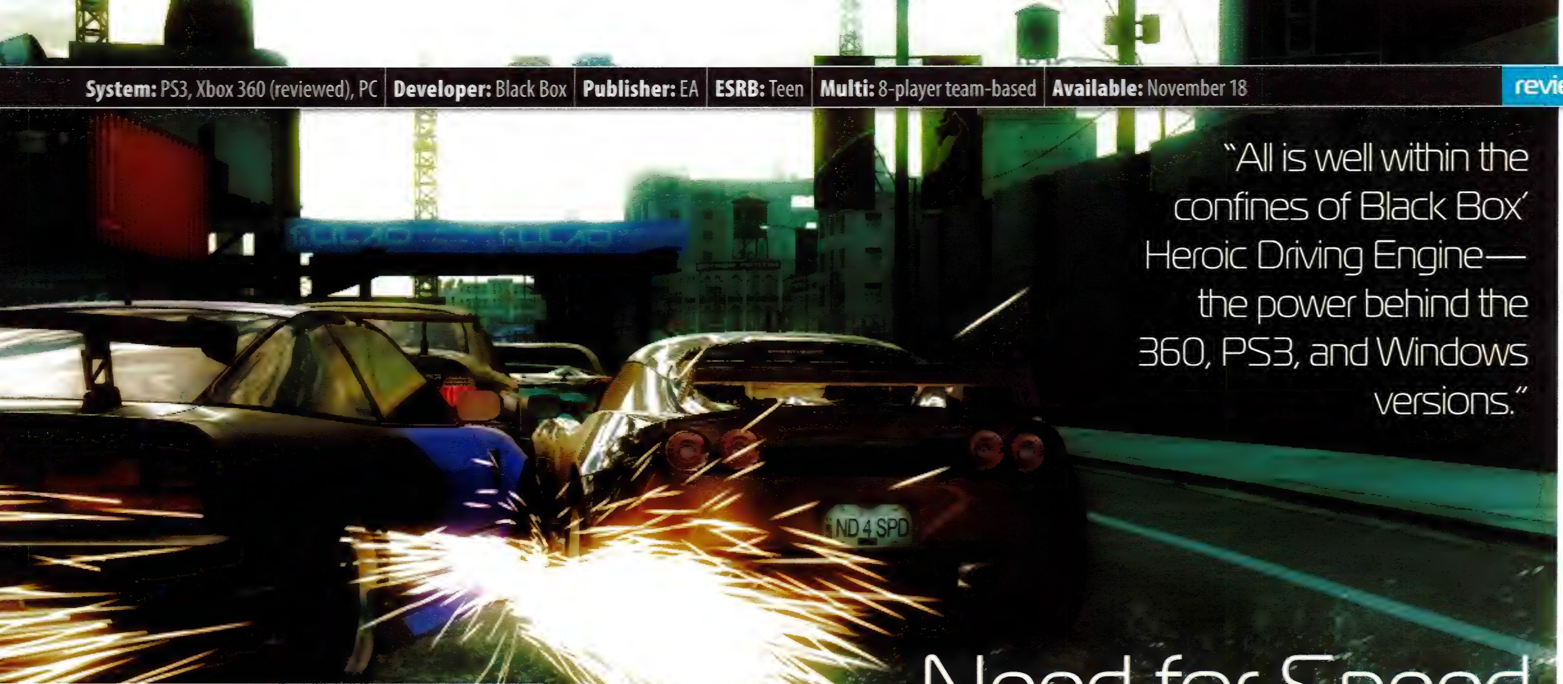
A loud sound echoes throughout.

> "Again, a message to game companies: You must start hiring SAG voice actors and WGA script editors."

Information
Elysion - Hendler
Shopper Girl

Everything's kind of expensive, but it's only because we sell the best!

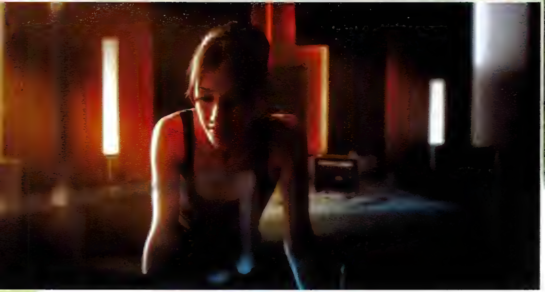
System: PS3, Xbox 360 (reviewed), PC | **Developer:** Black Box | **Publisher:** EA | **ESRB:** Teen | **Multi:** 8-player team-based | **Available:** November 18



> "All is well within the confines of Black Box' Heroic Driving Engine—the power behind the 360, PS3, and Windows versions."

Need for Speed Undercover

The twelfth time is the charm



words Dave Halverson

I used to balk at "FMV," but since it's graduated to HD live-action, not so much—especially in the wake of so many wooden CGI "cinemas"—but if the guy in Need for Speed Undercover's real-time opening sequence—which seamlessly drops you into the driver's seat leading up to your inevitable arrest, very slick—is the same guy as the one in the ensuing live-action scene, I'll play Igor on Wii exclusively for a week. I only mention it because it's about the only thing bad I have to say about Undercover, other than a few derivative tidbits like not being able to free-look out my side window, or the elapsed time sandwiched between police cruisers before I get "Busted!" (I can get away, really! Don't take my money!).

Ah, precious money. Those all-important funds used to either modify your car (or cars), or buy a new one (which in Undercover is a big decision). I spent more time in the garage in Undercover than any other game like it. Not just because of the music—which is some of the best I've heard in a game in a very long time—or the many ways to paint, tune and modify my cars—although I did spend 40 minutes applying vinyls to my GTO once—but because you really have to earn your money in Undercover and new cars are real-world expensive. You're awarded certain low-to-mid-level cars sporadically through versus challenges and by penetrating the crime syndicate you've been forced to infiltrate, but you won't see a Mercedes CL55 or Porsche 911 GT2 until you've raced, destroyed, stolen, and battled so much you can drive from the Gulf Coast to the Tri-Cities area with your eyes closed.

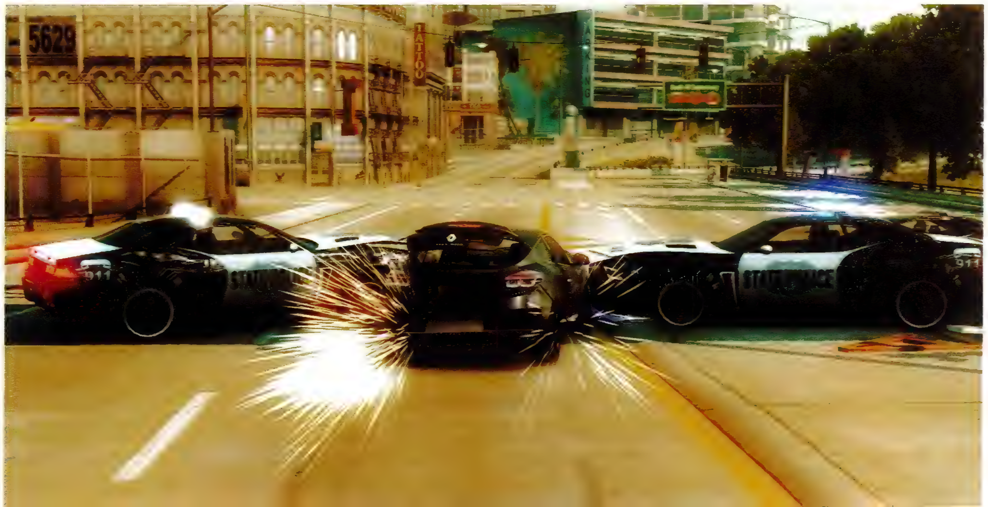
The name of the game in Undercover is open world driving and lots of it. Snuggling up to an international crime syndicate from the lowest small-time hack to the pinnacle of white collar crime, causing mayhem and winning races gets you noticed and pulling jobs gets you street cred. It all spills onto the road by way of Highway Battles (staying ahead of the competition or taking them out), checkpoint, sprint, battle, circuit, and highway racing, and countless opportunities to commit various acts of vehicular mayhem. If you like police chases, Undercover's are reason enough alone to warrant a purchase. The police AI in the NFS series has always been good, but until Undercover it's never been so smart. These cops play for keeps and use real-world tactics to take you down. Fortunately, you should always be one step ahead of them, but if not you can always slow things down to even the stakes, or make a beeline for the nearest destruction event. The best way, though, is through sheer insanity—using the game's ample physics engine and your own tactical road rage to lose them.

The better you drive, the faster your Wheelman Rep grows, and the more money you'll earn. Winning races or evading police is good, but Dominating is really the key. Dominating earns you Driver Skills which equate to performance upgrades (Engine, Nitrous, Suspension, Forced Induction—you know the drill), bigger purses for winning races, discounts at parts shops, and additional zone points for pulling off heroic driving maneuvers. All is well within the confines of Black Box' Heroic Driving Engine—the power behind the 360, PS3, and Windows versions.

Perhaps the best things about Undercover is that it's another "play-it-your-way" game along the lines of NFS: Most Wanted (let's just pretend Pro Street never happened), the last great game in the series. The area covered (three cities connected by an extensive highway system) is not only vast, but incredibly diverse and peppered with almost limitless crannies, shortcuts, construction zones, and off-road access. You can follow the story to the letter and ogle all the live-action starring Maggie Quigley as your handler Chase Linh; partake in whatever events in whatever order you prefer; or just drive, although I guarantee that regardless of your modus-operandi, you will inevitably end up in the garage paying for way too many paint jobs, messing around with vinyls, and listening to music. Black Box should stick girls on trampolines in here and charge admission. Okay so, EA, Black Box…That's 12 in the can. Can we please have another round of Road Rash? Pretty please, with money on top?

parting **shot**

I'll never grow tired of open world racing as long as games like Undercover keep it this real. There are so many ways to enjoy the game, all of which are extremely well-crafted, adrenaline charged, and seamlessly woven into the vastness of the game world. EA and Black Box also do a great job on the game's menus, map, and overall presentation, especially the garage where 55 cars and one sublime soundtrack await.



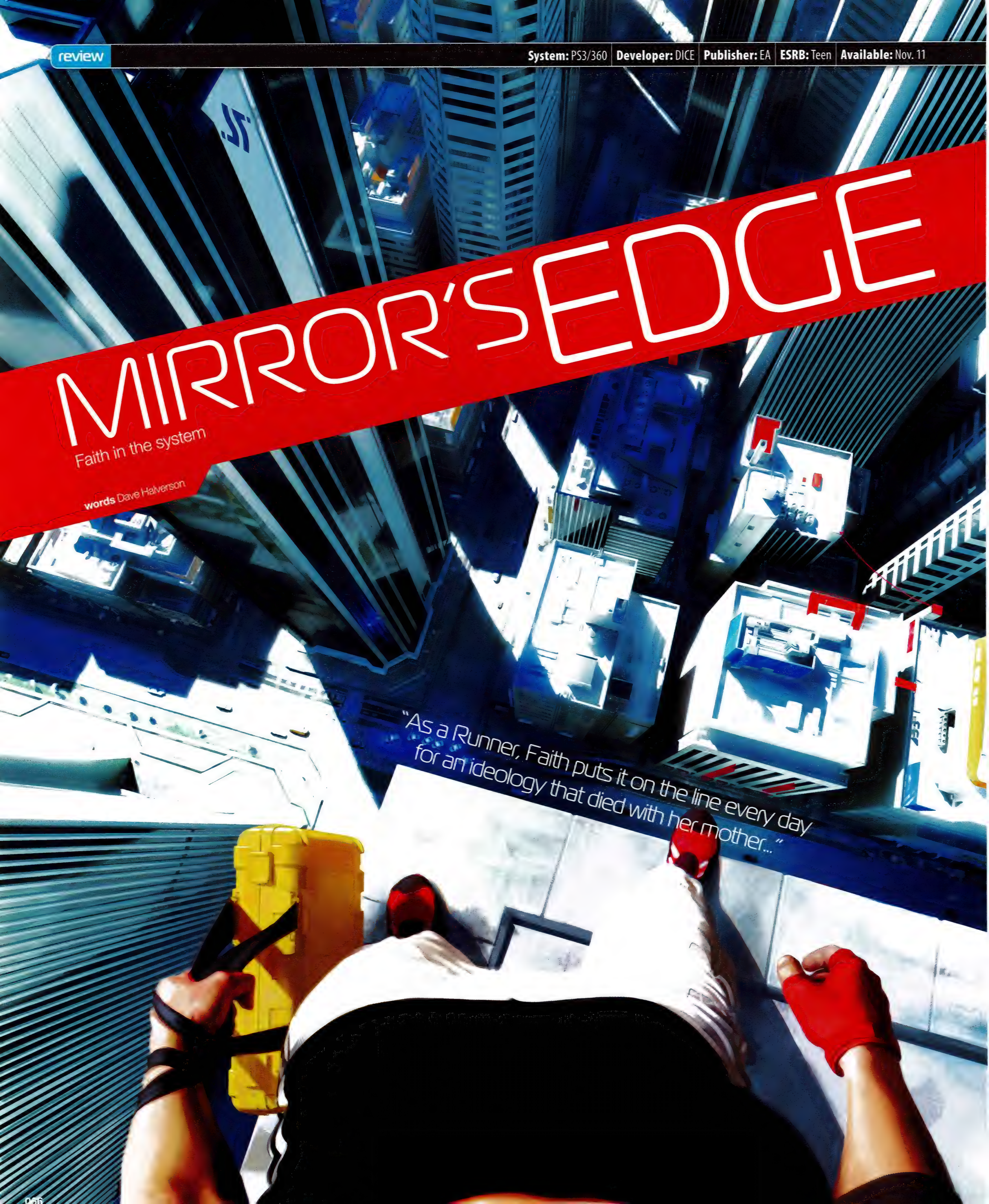
System: PS3/360 | **Developer:** DICE | **Publisher:** EA | **ESRB:** Teen | **Available:** Nov. 11

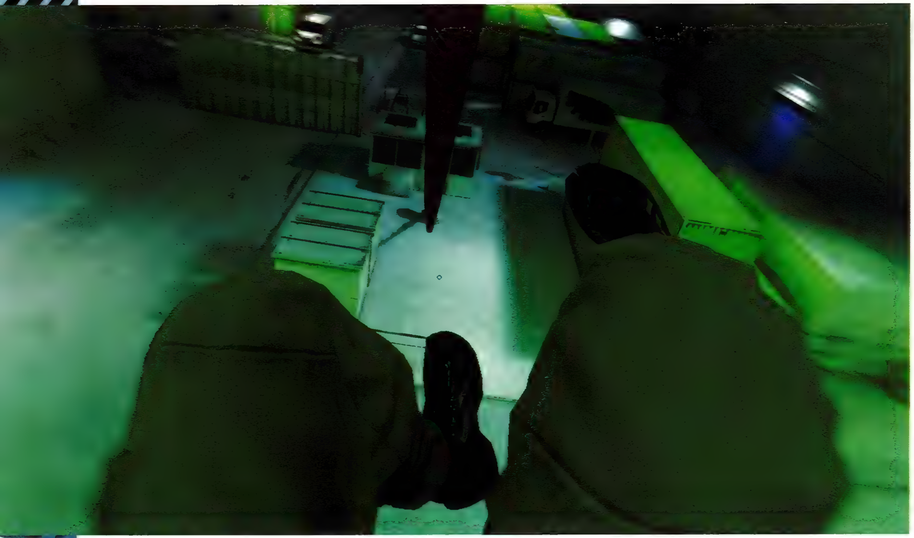
MIRROR'S EDGE

Faith in the system

words Dave Halverson

> "As a Runner, Faith puts it on the line every day for an ideology that died with her mother..."

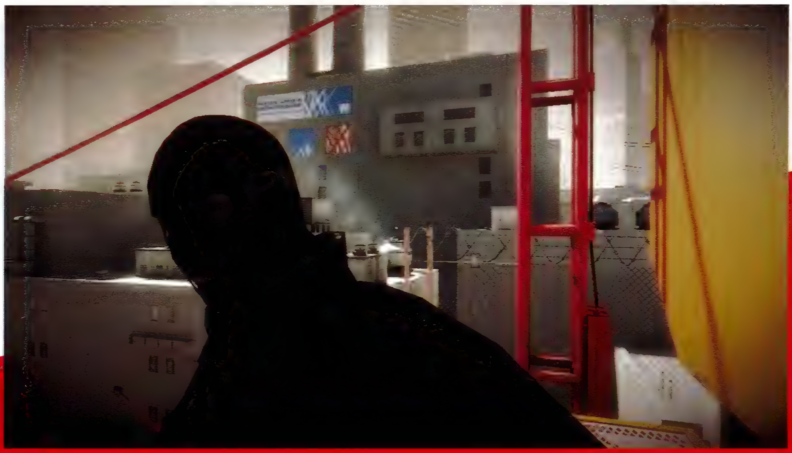


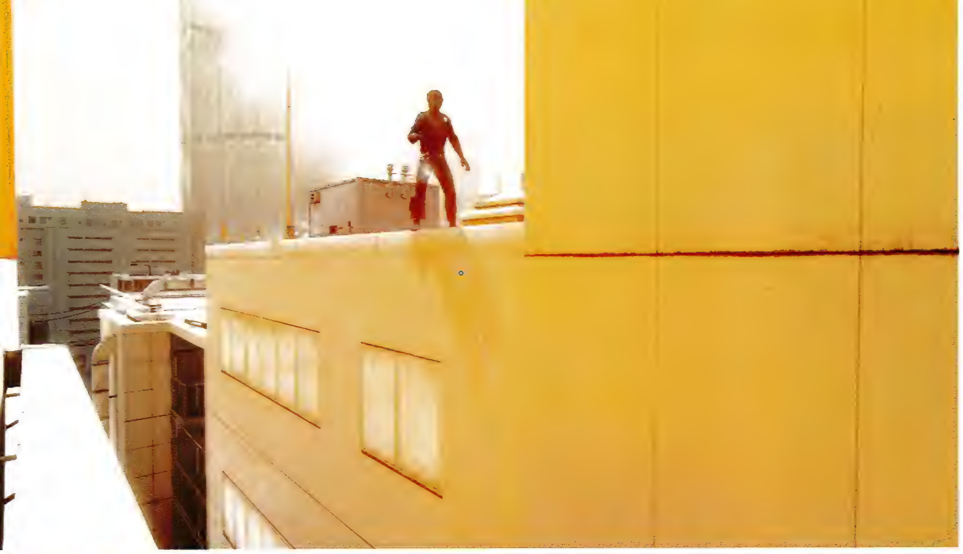


Throughout gaming's relatively short history, female protagonists have almost always either been portrayed or perceived as über-sexy. From the opposing point of view however, the same can easily be said about male leads (when was the last time you saw a pudgy hero save the day?) although what it all really boils down to is simple dollars and cents. You know what they say: sex sells. But is sex all that sells?

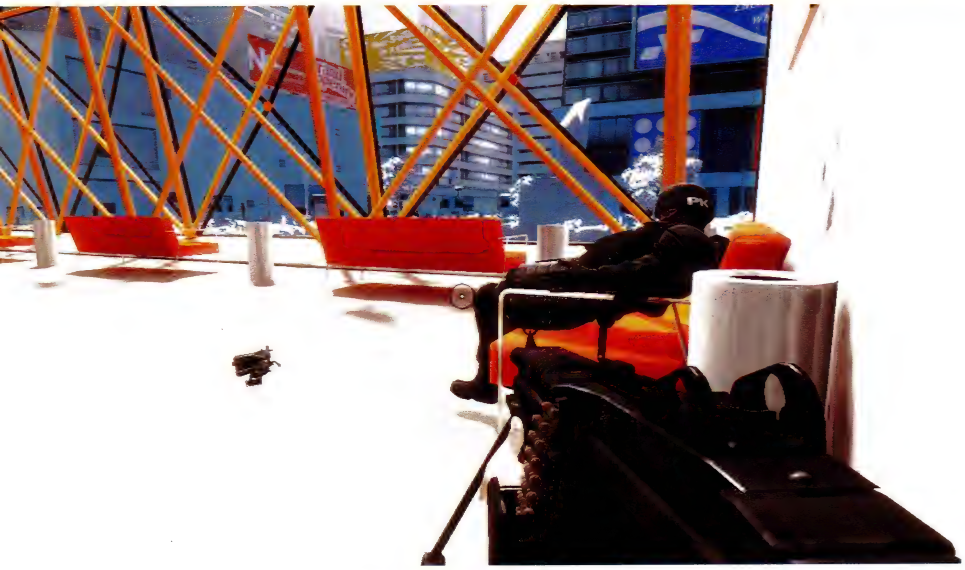
Games are our escape, so naturally we want our heroes and heroines to be bigger and better than life, but as someone who prefers female leads I can't think of one I'd consider a "bimbo," the term commonly used to describe the female equivalent of a Dante or Prince of Persia. I can think of plenty who do battle in various states of undress, but no bimbos. I don't think it's a matter of gender as much as the status quo's belief that the only way to sell a female lead is half-naked. Oh ye of little faith; if Faith were portrayed as "sexy," Mirror's Edge wouldn't have near the impact. Mirror's Edge proves that a strong independent female can carry a blockbuster game. I could also argue that Faith's sense of pride and independence makes her sexier than the vast majority of half-naked heroines, in the vein of Jade or Nariko. Not to seem sanctimonious; in a fantasy or other appropriate setting I prefer my heroines exposed. What excites me is the perception that a female can be either sexy or serious. We need female characters on both sides of the spectrum. For every Conan, a Sam Fisher and for every Nina Williams, you gotta have Faith…

As a Runner, Faith puts it on the line every day for an ideology that died with her mother: The belief that a free city with problems is better than a false utopia. Risking life and limb to deliver packages and information to what resistance is left, Runners use the rooftops and aerial skyways they call the Mirror's Edge to cover the city with only the voice in their heads to guide them. For Faith, that's Mercury, a former Runner who took her in when she was 16 and made her the Runner she is today. Faith finds solace (and a decent paycheck) where most find paralyzing fear; parkour running hundreds of feet above street level is





"There's never been anything like it, and unless they make another, there probably never will be."



a sensation none of us would or could ever feel were it not for DICE's amazing accomplishment. For the sheer gameplay alone, Mirror's Edge is a triumph. There's never been anything like it, and unless they make another, there probably never will be. Faith could have been delivering pizzas for all I care. I'd still have enjoyed every inch. Such a solid story was unexpected. It's straightforward but ultimately heartfelt and spliced into the game in such a way that it flows in cadence with the action. It's all around you. When Mercury isn't feeding you information, you can graze it from the propaganda that hits every screen in the city. There are eyes everywhere…guns too.

Prepare to become intimately familiar with your controller's shoulder buttons. Via surprisingly simple controls, Faith wall-runs, jumps, slides, tumbles, vaults, drop, zips, grapples, and bounds using only color, a general sense of direction (if that) and instinct to negotiate the dense rooftops of the city, usually at speed and in a hail of bullets. At first it's a trial and error thing, naturally, but the more accustomed you become with the flow of the game, the further you drift away from yourself and into Faith. When it clicks, it's a beautiful thing. There's no HUD in Mirror's Edge and no map. Runner Vision provides a vague bearing but otherwise much of the action is based on instinct. And when you do fall, the loading is swift and you'll usually lose little if any ground.

In the instances you do have to fight—"Blues" and other enemies come down harder as the game wears on—the combat and gunplay are somewhat user defined, although as a rule you can run away from enemies with a blue aura, but a red one denotes you need to stand and fight.

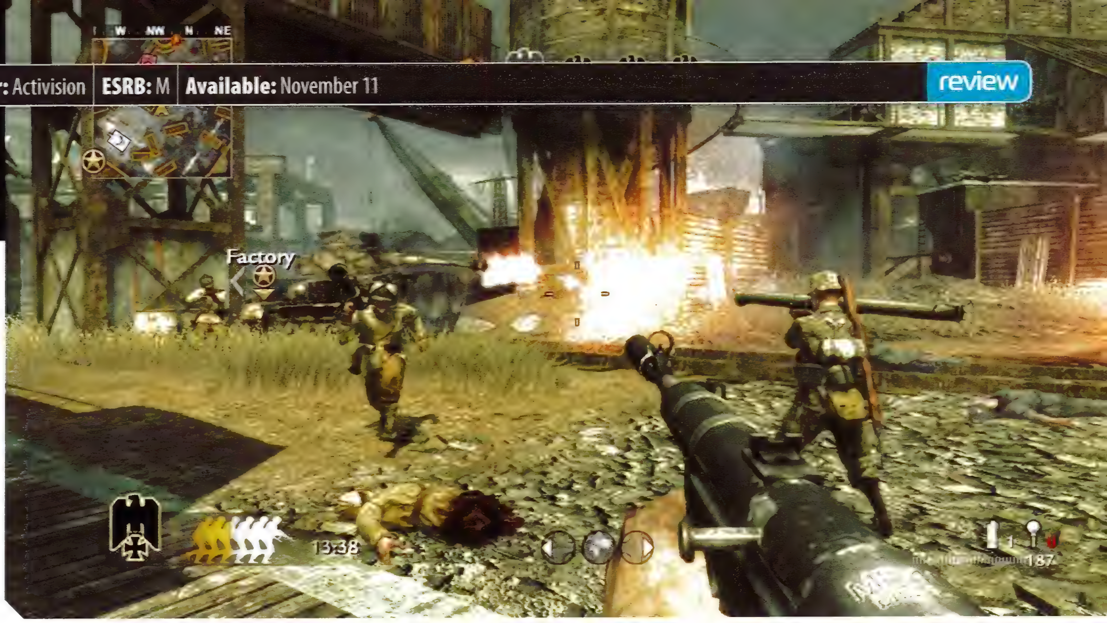
Disarming moves are essential, either by grabbing an incoming weapon at the precise moment it turns red or a number of sliding or kicking maneuvers depending on proximity. The easiest way to deal with combat situations is by slowing down the world around you with "Reaction Time" gained by sustaining maximum speed over time. How much or how little shooting Faith engages in is largely dependent on how you play, although there are some brutal shootouts, especially towards the end. Melee combat is great too, especially sliding and flying kicks. Fortunately there's ample time to stop and ogle the graphics too, because you'd go mad otherwise always running by such beauty. It's hard to process that what you're looking at are polygons and not a window into another world. The pseudo-realism is truly stupefying. Never have textures been so subtle and defined at the same time, and the use of primary colors, numerous lighting tricks and haze is astounding. My favorite moments in the game are the stretches of solitude negotiating seemingly impossible, almost Escher-like interior ascents where the only sounds are Faith's footsteps and breathing and maybe a faint wind outside; every so often catching Faith's shadow and fading back into reality. The soundtrack is sparse, limited to primarily mood enhancing refrains, a few of which run right down your spine.

One of my all-time favorite games is Jet Set Radio Future. There was a sensation I got playing it that I hadn't felt since. Mirror's Edge did for me now what JSRF did for me then, combining the joy of great gameplay with a profound sense of being in the moment, only now I can look to the PlayStation network for more as the longing for the next run begins.

parting **shot**

Mirror's Edge hits every target, introducing never before experienced gameplay, pushing technological boundaries, launching a brand with endless possibility, and advancing the first person action genre in the process. A watershed moment.

System: Xbox 360, PS3, PC | **Developer:** Treyarch | **Publisher:** Activision | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** November 11



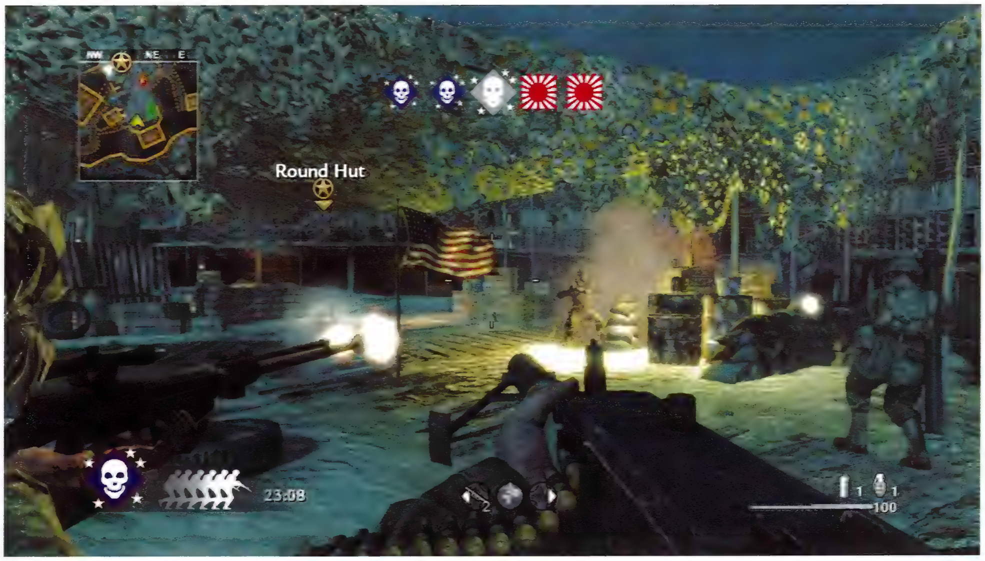
And another casual gamer bites the dust.

Call of Duty: World at War

Jack Bauer, Commissioner Gordon, and zombies help revive fledgling genre

words Matt Cabral

We've all heard how World War II shooters have grown staler than hardtack—I declared them dead myself after playing EA's not-quite-ambitious-enough Medal of Honor: Airborne. But after battling through last year's Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare follow-up Call of Duty: World at War, it's difficult to deny the genre a resurgent validity. World at War is Treyarch's latest march to the frontline; their last, Call of Duty 3, was widely criticized as an uninspired rehash of Infinity Ward's 360 launch title Call of Duty 2. Once again, though, Treyarch find themselves fighting for recognition as a serious contributor to the series, as last year's aforementioned Infinity Ward effort still looms large as the franchise's finest hour. Despite that pressure, and the challenge of once again treading familiar WWII fare, the creative team behind World at War have brought their A game, delivering a title that borrows the best from CoD4, while also injecting enough freshness to get any fan diving back into their foxhole.



> "...bodies are charred, limbs are blown to bits, and shotgun blasts to the face fill the screen with chunks of bloody flesh"

Built on the CoD 4 engine, World at War retains that title's polished presentation and pacing; stunning visuals, supported by highly produced set pieces and scripted moments immerse players in scary-real scenarios of orchestrated chaos. The graphical showcase, coupled with crisp audio—those with a surround sound set-up are in for a treat—set the stage for a breathless campaign of truly cinematic proportions. Complementing the blockbuster style is top-notch voice performances from Kiefer Sutherland and Gary Oldman, directing the action through the Pacific Theater and Red Army campaigns, respectively. 24 fans will especially enjoy Sutherland's performance—shut your eyes and you'd swear you're sitting in front of an episode of the terrorist-thwarting series every time his character lets loose a "Hold your position!" or "Fire in the hole!"

Speaking of our favorite ex-CTU agent, Bauer would no doubt approve of World at Wars' violence-fueled focus, which, by the way earned the series its first M rating. The game begins with a brutal scene of one of your brothers in arms being tortured, and it just gets gorier from there—bodies are charred, limbs are blown to bits, and shotgun blasts to the face fill the screen with chunks of bloody flesh. While this survival horror-like level of gore steals the surface attention, it's the smaller touches that emphasize the care World at War's creators have put into creating an engaging experience. Sure, taking a flamethrower to a tree and barbequing its branch-sitting sniper is a sight, but seeing his corpse dangle from the very tether that was fastened to keep him safe, displays some nice attention to detail. Subtler and even cooler, is the way your soldier smartly reloads his double barrel shotgun: Fire both barrels and he'll reload them both, but fire just one and reload, and his thumb holds the remaining shell while filling the empty chamber. World at War is simply brimming with this sort of polish at every turn.

Couple the rich presentation with fantastic FPS action, further supported by addictive 4-person co-operative play and a bevy of online competitive modes, and you've got a reason to renew your interest in this previously dead genre. If you don't dig war-based shooters, though, this one won't convert you. In fact, the intense violence will likely turn you off even further. However, anyone who dedicated a few hours to conquering Modern Warfare's "Mile High Club" mission on veteran difficulty will definitely want to enlist for Call of Duty's latest tour. Oh, and if the co-op, single and multiplayer modes still leave you wanting, be sure to check out the Nazi Zombie mode, unlocked upon completing the solo campaign.

parting shot

World at War's polished-to-perfection presentation and intense FPS action support a AAA package that finally puts Treyarch on par with their Infinity Ward peers.

System: Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Lionhead Studios | **Publisher:** Microsoft | **Multi:** Yes | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** Now

Fable 2

The story of you, too …

words Greg Orlando

The world has moved on. In the fabled land of Albion, the people don't oftentimes speak of heroes, although they certainly do need them. In this new world, magic has become an oddity, and where archers once held sway, now gunslingers roam the land.

In this brave new world, a boy and his dog will carve out a future; The boy's actions slowly but surely shaping the world, changing it for good or evil.

It is, at once, a tremendous story.

Fable 2 takes place some 500 years after the events of the first Fable. The world has opened up dramatically; the original Fable's largely fenced-in environments have been scrapped for something vastly more expansive. Now, it's easy to get lost in Albion's many nooks and crannies and amid its meandering fields and sprawling cities; so much so the game introduces an electronic breadcrumb trail to lead players to their directives.

With Fable 2, developer Peter Molyneux stabs at a lot of ideas, spears a good many of them, and misses mightily with others. The introduction of a dog as a non-player ally, for example, was meant to tie a player to unconditional love and obedience. This, in turn, was meant to elicit a response of love from the player toward the dog. It was an ambitious move on the developer's part, and it's disheartening to note the reality falls short of the intention. The dog is many things: a helpful tool by which buried treasures are revealed, a mechanism for solving some in-game puzzles, and a combat aid. It is not, however, something that will evoke a wellspring of emotion. At best, players may feel some remorse when the dog suffers in combat and begins hobbling. Yet this seems a cheap and hollow means by which to evoke sympathy. The dog is easily healed and there are no lasting consequences from any injuries.

At the game's conclusion, Molyneux attempts a very transparent trick with the dog. It's clearly meant to yank the player's heartstrings, and lay the groundwork for one of the game's many moral choices. What follows would be a crucial test of the player's true feelings for the dog, except for the fact that the dog is more functional than it is lovable.

Other ideas, such as the game's persistent morality system, the notion of a malleable world and a hero who helps guide its destiny, and a one-button combat mechanic are more fully realized. It's here that players are able to put their own stamp on the game and truly make it their own.

Even as a child, the game's hero can make a difference. During one sequence, players are tasked with recovering arrest warrants for a local sheriff. Once the warrants have been collected, players are presented with a simple choice: take the expedient path and give the warrants to a criminal, or hand the documents to the law. When the protagonist returns to the town years later, he's able to see exactly how he's influenced the world. Depending on the choice, the town is either crime-ridden slum or commercial paradise.

Actions have weight in Fable 2. Detractors will note that some actions do not have the appropriate weight or are too easily reversed, and this is all too true. For the most part, however, what a player does in the game is recognized and remembered. It influences the people and the world. When a noble hero walks into town, people flock toward him, awash in admiration. They cheer his deeds and ask for his autograph. Enter as a doer of evil, and the citizenry will cower appropriately.

The game lets players develop their character as they see fit. Experience gained during fights can be applied toward making a hero stronger, more skillful, or magically adept. It's possible, then, to create a nimble gunslinger, a beefy warrior, or a powerful magic user—or any combination thereof. Fable 2 is flexible enough to allow for a warrior able to pop off a headshot (or, better still, a groin shot) from long distance with a rifle, or a dextrous wizard able to supplement his income with copious amounts of thievery.

The one-button combat presents a basic level of functionality, but opens up to allow for a lot of wonderful possibilities. During melee combat and with the appropriate experience, a hero can block enemy attacks, perform unblockable flourishes (including a very evil killing blow on a fallen enemy), and even disarm opponents. Magic use allows for area-based attacks or focused strikes, and offers a neat, five-tiered spell system. Players simply map a specific spell (raise dead, lightning, fireball, etc.) to a tier and then press and hold to charge a spell. While it's sad to note the original Fable's wonderfully wicked forked lightning, a devastating spell that could be performed as long as its caster had mana power, has been changed, it's hard to deny the new magic system in Fable 2 is simply more functional—it does away with mana—and flexible.

From there, Fable 2 leaps off. And soars. It's human enough to remind us we're all human when it presents a heartfelt lesson in tolerance from a farmer who very much loves his son. And it's got enough of a sense of humor to allow the hero to perform sock puppetry and farts alike. It's even self-aware enough to know that sometimes girls can be heroes, too. That's why it's entirely possible to forgive the game for its sins: a weak ending, some unpolished gameplay, and an underdeveloped online cooperative mode.

To steal from David Bowie: We could be heroes.

Amen.

parting shot

Farts are funny, and in Peter Molyneux we trust. Fable 2 is a fine role-playing adventure.

> "The one-button combat presents a basic level of functionality, but opens up to allow for a lot of wonderful possibilities."

System: PS2/Wii (reviewed) | **Developer:** Sonic Team | **Publisher:** Sega | **ESRB:** E | **Available:** November 18

Sonic Unleashed

A hog of their own

words Dave Halverson

After seeing Sonic Unleashed for the first time on Xbox 360 back in January, along with an up-close-and-personal look at the new Hedgehog Engine, when I saw the Wii listed as a format on the press materials I thought it was mistake. Finding out that it wasn't (and nothing else, Sega wouldn't budge) my mind defaulted to the usual protocol: it would either be a port, which in this case would have to be bare-naked and flat-shaded and would still run at about 20 fps, or an external studio knock-off scaled down to Wii size; the latter of course being the best but least likely case. While I was up at Sega a few weeks back to play the 360 version, and nobody mentioned the Wii version, I figured it was months behind or toast. So when the Wii version of the game not only arrived first but tailor made (very well) for Wii waggling, I was surprised, yet elated, yet wary.

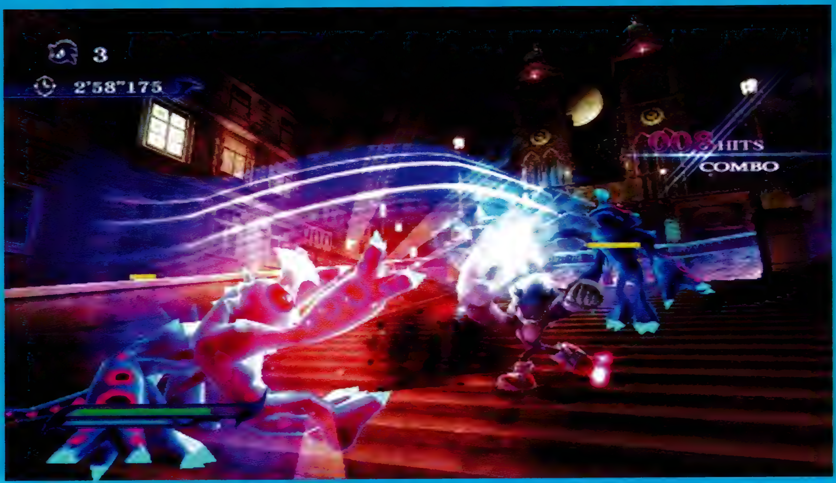
As Unleashed gates underway Dr. Eggman is having himself a very good day. He's managed to get Sonic to transform into Super Sonic and walk right into his trap: a high-energy shield that strips him of his powers and the Chaos Emeralds which Eggman then uses to awaken Dark Gaia, a powerful monster lodged within the planet's core. But Eggman's awakened it too early; the monster can't hold its form and breaks down, causing a strange transformation in Sonic as living fragments rain down, rupturing the planet.

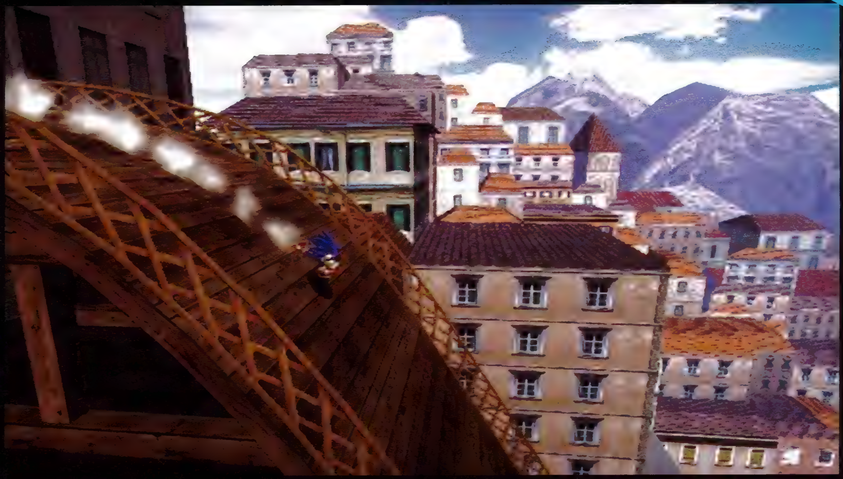
After surviving the fall from space, Sonic awakens to find he has company in the form of a strange little flying creature with amnesia he calls "Chip," but we come to know him as the Wii game's designated backseat gamer, on hand to state the obvious and make sure you never ever, *ever* have to think. Off to training we go.

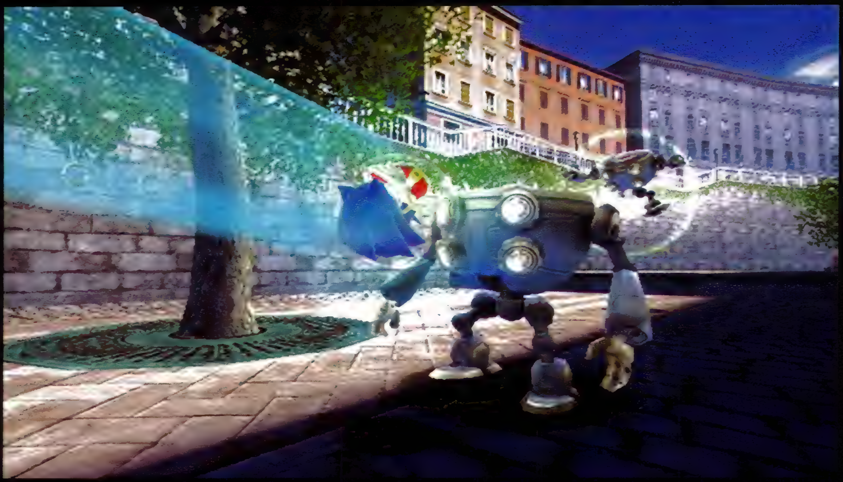
The game takes place over several continents in need of healing, each with a quaint little village and Gaia Gate leading to a Gaia Temple where you'll eventually find doors to the levels. You need the corresponding tablet to open each one, however, and the only way to get those is by clicking destinations around a static screen village (the ones that say "new" usually do the trick) until you come across a villager that happens to be carrying a sacred tablet fragment. Professor Pickle will be helping too, once you snatch him back from Eggman, along with Amy, who still loves Sonic even as a big bad wolf. It's all one big silly mechanism to deliver the story and point the way on a Dick and Jane level but it's harmless. The people are generally wacky and once you heal each continent you can change the setting from day to night and watch them get all jacked up on Dark Gaia.

Eventually Chip will actually stop chattering, the training will end and you'll find yourself confronted with an actual level where the quality gaming begins. The majority of the levels in the Wii game are played as the Werehog, so it's a good thing Sonic's low-speed assaults deliver better than expected. Sonic Team has built some great levels around the Werehog, heavy on both platforming and combat. Using Sonic's new stretchy-arms, two-button chain combos are a breeze and can be augmented with one-button finishing moves. It's not as deep as the next-gen version but totally suitable to the simplified Wii game. You can also convert the Dark Gaia Force you absorb to Health, Attack, and Unleash upgrades, or combo level-ups and finishing moves such as the Were-Hammer and Earthshaker. By galloping on all fours

"The majority of the levels in the Wii game are played as the Werehog, so it's a good thing Sonic's low-speed assaults deliver better than expected."







(by double-tapping the analog though—very awkward) the Werehog can also dizzy opponents to grab, pummel, or throw, and activate Unleashed Mode to deal more damage and take less. The combat happens in waves, indicated by purple barriers, gelatinous Gaia monsters rising out of the ground and what I can only describe as Lupin music. Like the next-gen version, when Sonic the Werehog isn't doing battle he's platforming, which in this case mixes traditional jumping routines with the stretchy arms to grab ledges and poles and transfer between them or grab onto and swing from hovering Gaia. Nothing too perilous at first, but the challenge does mount; the last few continents are definitely for the platforming savvy. It's a strange dichotomy: negotiating a series of brutal timing platforms and shimmying along ledges yet still having the giant picture of the R-button pasted on-screen for the duration.

The daytime levels are exceptionally impressive, where we find Sonic a similarly altered beast. Joining the Homing Attack and Lightspeed Dash are Sonic Boost, used to run on water and walls when momentum lets you down; Quick Step, a lightning fast left or right lane shift without losing momentum; the wall jump; and of course the super fun and long overdue Sonic-Drift which makes me wish they'd do a Sonic-R2. Sonic's still clumsy at low speed but in go-fast mode he's nicely refined. Unfortunately, we don't get to control him outside of his natural habitat like we do on 360 and PS3. Each daytime level is followed by a Ring Challenge where you need to collect a given number of rings in the allotted time, and every Sonic fan's worst nightmare: stages where the goal is to run a timed gauntlet of breakables…and not break anything. The world's squirreliest character with big red feet in a china shop; talk about reverse engineering your brain.

The only real problem I have with Unleashed on the Wii, aside from the coddling infrastructure, is the lose-lose-lose proposition of finding a controller to play it with. Unless you're a glutton for punishment, forget the Wii Remote and Nunchuk. The GameCube or WaveBird controller feels great, but using the shoulder buttons for quick jumps, spinning attacks and Werehog combat won't do your sanity any favors. Which leaves the Classic controller, which works well and is a great little pad… emphasis on "little." Though your index finger may suffer from prolonged R button exposure, it's the clear choice.

parting **shot**

Sega did the right thing by creating a version of Unleashed specifically for the Wii and PS2, delivering quality games respectively, although it's also a reminder of just how far apart the current consoles are. It would be nice to have more big daytime levels but what's here Sonic Team definitely make the most of. The Wii version is different enough and made so well that it's worth a look if you own both systems too. Wii users aren't getting anywhere near the game next-gen owners are, but at least they're getting a quality Wii version over a port.

System: PS3/Xbox360 (reviewed) | **Developer:** Sonic Team | **Publisher:** Sega | **ESRB:** E | **Available:** November 18

Sonic Unleashed

Hedgehog wild

words Dave Halverson

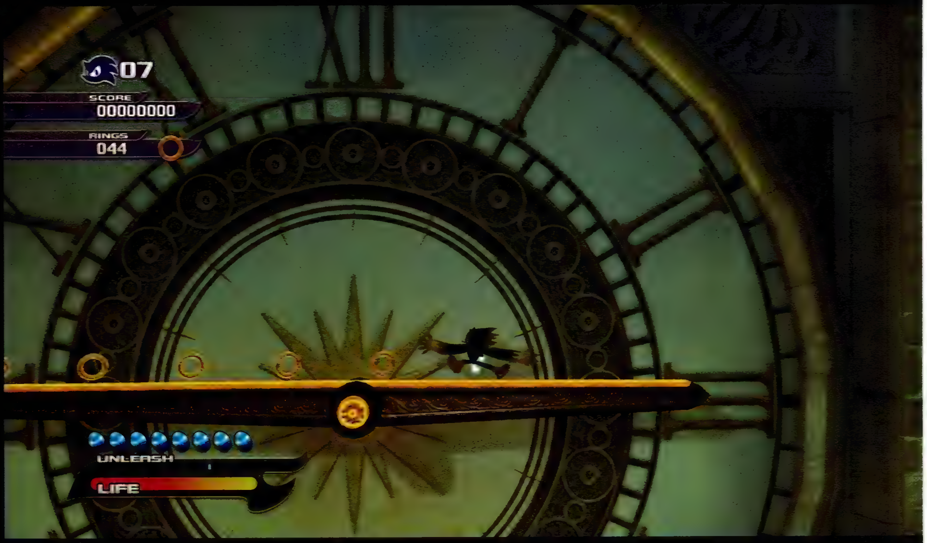
It's been almost nine years since Sonic's Y2K spin into the world of 3D. Nine years of hits, misses and everything in-between, from hover-board racing to the Olympic Games. And while the series that defined Sega in the '90s has always enjoyed varying degrees of success, Sonic Team has yet to deliver the quintessential 3D Sonic. Transitioning a game of speed and momentum into 3D has proven a difficult task and the buggy nature of the engines from Dreamcast on has been the Energizer bunny of flies in the ointment.

Playing the Wii version of Sonic Unleashed first, as good as it is, made playing the 360 version a religious experience. I was waiting for the clouds to open up and shoot out some real-time heavenly light sourcing. The two versions aren't even in the same stratosphere. The set-up is the same (Eggman cracks the Dark Gaia out of its planet shell prematurely causing it to break down and spread little Dark Gaia monsters all over the planet, turning Sonic into a werehog in the process) but that's where the similarities end.

It's good to know that there's still a little mystery left in the world. I did not expect Sonic Unleashed to have *more* RPG underpinnings than either Sonic Adventure or last year's stomped-on Sonic the Hedgehog. Sonic comes to after his fall from space alongside "Chip," but after the initial chit-chat the little guy keeps it pretty well zipped; no training and no lame "hints," just Sonic and the spry people of Apotos, the lovely port town where it all begins. Nudging the left analog ever so slightly (as you must), Sonic already feels better—walking slowly and smoothly, speeding up manageably and turning on a tight radius—common for most characters but a real chore for Sonic, who's always had a tendency to get away from you. After milling about the quaint sun-drenched town chatting it up with the surprisingly chipper natives for being on a planet that just split apart, the far end of the village lets out into an "Entrance Stage," Sonic's all-new (and quite brilliant) city, town, and village hubs where Sonic and Werehog Sonic can discover or use earned upgrades and items, enter (or re-enter) levels or change day to night depending on the situation. They're packed with a nice bit of gameplay too. The other side of town leads to the planet overview…No silly temple and no silly doors.

Where the Wii had pictures, villagers now stand, resembling film-quality CGI more than the stick people we're used to, and (hold onto your hats) the writing is exceptional—charming and witty, and the voice acting pretty much great, including the original Japanese audio track with subtitles. There are shops too, but not of the usual variety. These are for buying and selling souvenirs, food and other items for use in other parts of the game as you travel around the fractured globe. Most vendors just share their thoughts, which are usually funny, or ask you a favor, though some will quiz you and reward a good job. The guy selling hot dogs wants you to complete time trials before he'll sell to you (that must be some hot dog!). The thing is, everyone is interesting. It's everything Sonic Adventure wanted to be finally (and finely) refined.

There have been changes to the level



02
09:20:07
00005000
RING ENERGY
039

structure too, beginning with the standard Sonic speed run, now strictly a daytime affair. They're much longer and branching; much faster and smoother, but mostly they're more hands-on. The days of holding a direction and completing long stretches of a level are long gone. These levels are wider, layered with way more speed pads, bumpers, enemy robots, platforms, speed rings, cannons, and all kinds of traps…not to mention architecture. They are also about 90 percent cleaner than any previous 3D Sonic. Initially Sonic can drift (and the levels have sweeping banks and turns that call for it), quick step left or right and use his homing attack and slide, but there's much more to come. As you clear levels you'll discover new abilities and items (for both Sonics) to reach previously unreachable areas, much like the progression in Metroid. Regular Sonic finds shoes (for sky running, stomping, wall jumping, etc.) and Werehog Sonic, well, we'll get to him. One thing to remember is that your first time through most daytime stages is nothing compared to when you return later with new abilities. Overall, while the daytime levels are on the hard side (if you want to excel you'll need lightning reflexes too), they are equally rewarding and replayable. I did find a couple of hiccups, most notably in the first daytime run in beautiful snow-covered Holoska. The sled handles like an old Buick and Sonic is still a bit clunky at low speeds when you really need to gather rings (which you do here). Chances are it'll get buttoned up in final testing but if not remember, patience is a virtue.

676
LV3 [42]
LV3 [33]
0/2
Talk

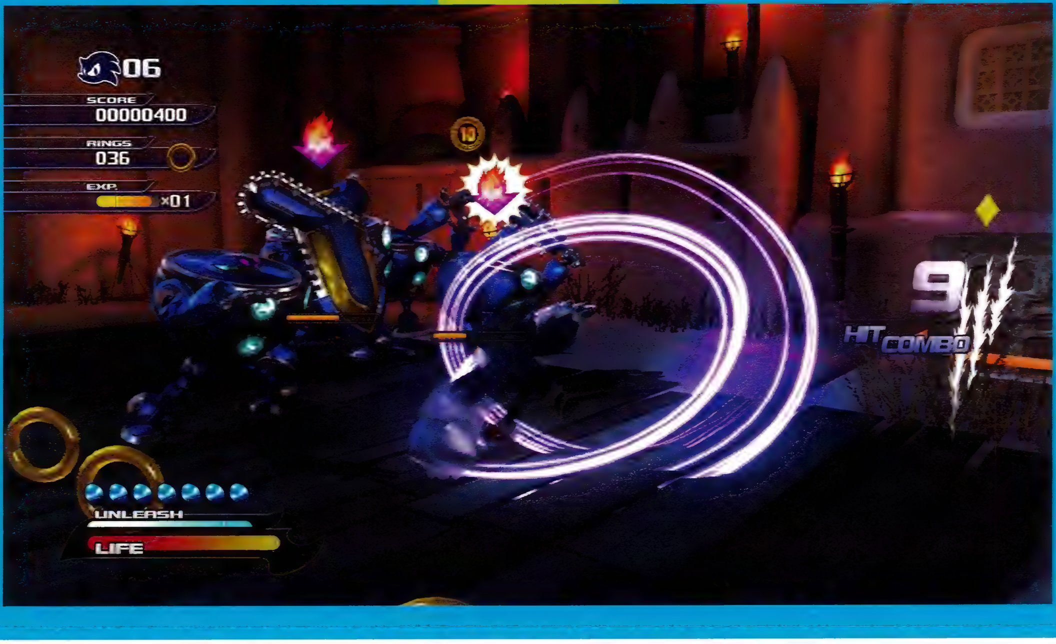
"It's everything Sonic Adventure wanted to be finally (and finely) refined."

The biggest question for me going into Unleashed (and many a Sonic fan, I'm sure) was the Werehog. I loved the idea from the beginning—kind of a Wario for Sonic—but such a radical departure seemed risky. Of course, now I can't imagine a game without him. The gruff attitude is a nice change and not at all overplayed and the gameplay, especially if you like fierce combat and fiercer platforming, is 100 percent hardcore. Amy seems okay with it too (when she's not hanging out with Professor Pickle). At the end of every stage, earned experience can be applied to combat, strength, life, Unleash, or shield power or to regular Sonic's speed or ring energy. Sonic the Werehog's combat experience covers ten variations on five methods of attack. You'll need them all too. Flailing away will not work. The Dark Gaia in the 360 game are raging, swarming, diverse, and tough. They're also too much fun to battle using the Werehog's stretchy arms and amazing combos and special moves. The boss battles are extra-crispy too. Three bouncy hits and out these are not. The Eggman bosses are the worst (therefore best); often wicked fast and always extraordinarily striking, but the big Dark Gaia bosses are more fun. The platforming follows suit with the combat, if not more so. The biggest Wii level is like a junior training mission in comparison. The Werehog levels, once you get past Spagonia (where I'm pretty sure Sonic Team are in violation of every porn music statute on record) are probably the highlight of the game. Spagonia's Werehog levels are good, they just get much better, and leave the Starsky and Hutch theme behind. The soundtrack otherwise is a mixture of Trademark Sonic Team Muzak and classic area derivative BGM.

Something else you should know about Yoshihisa Hashimoto's Sonic…He loves his quick-time events. There's a great Tails shooter in Unleashed where Sonic fires from the wings of the Tornado in quick-time, the Dark Gaia Bosses are all finished off with quick-time, Werehog Sonic's devastating grab moves are quick-time, and if you want to reach the highest points and get the highest grades in Sonic's daytime levels be on the lookout for 3-button mid-air quick-time! It's a good thing that Sonic Team is really good at quick-time. It's also strictly of the cushy variety and the results are always spectacular.

Unleashed on 360 and PS3 is probably the hardest Sonic yet (by design). It's definitely the deepest yet—I've been finding all sorts of little side quests, hidden places, homages and innuendo —it's the most repayable, the best written and acted, and by far the best looking. Sonic Team always delivered visual stimuli but they've outdone themselves this time, including the CGI, which once again is on par with Square's.

Of all the squatty little mascots that have come and gone over the years, two became legends—Mario and Sonic—but the way Nintendo's going Mario's next game could be tossing pizzas so, it's up to Sonic now. Judging by the size of those fangs, he's up to the challenge.



parting shot

Sonic Unleashed is somewhat miraculous. Sonic Team has managed a redesign, tamed Sonic, and built a huge game in two year's time, including a Wii/PS2 version. The RPG elements have finally come together, and Sonic the Werehog doubles the gameplay while slowing down the pace, allowing Sonic Team to use the kind of creativity we saw in Billy Hatcher to design some great platforming worlds, only with today's tech and a Sonic-size budget. Unleashed is their best 3D game yet.

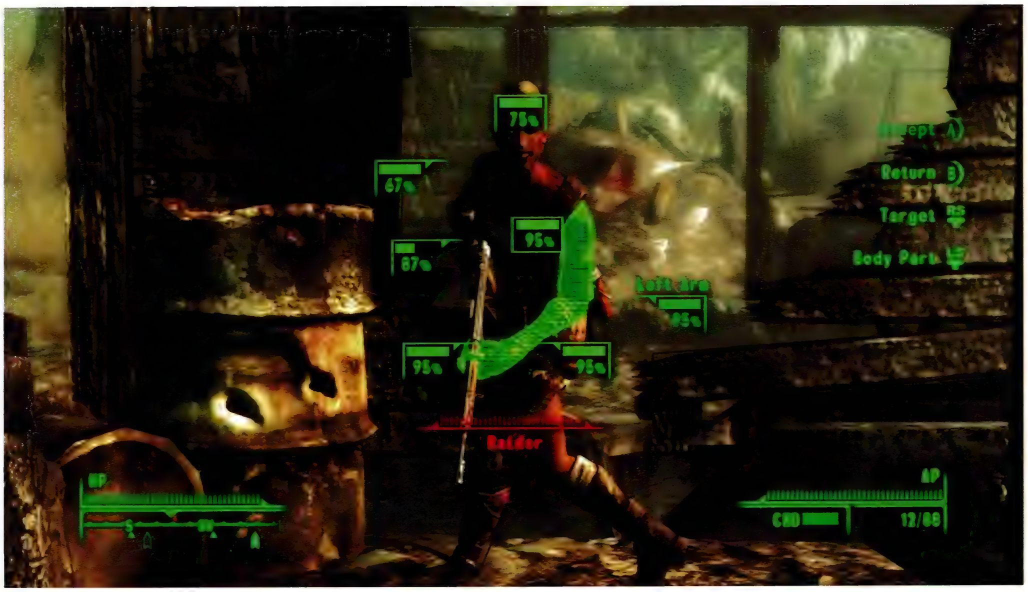
System: Xbox 360, PS3, PC | **Developer:** Bethesda | **Publisher:** Bethesda Softworks | **Multi:** DLC Forthcoming | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** October 28

Fallout 3

Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.

words Heather Campbell

> "Wanna save a town from certain destruction, only to prowl it at night pickpocketing the residents? You're free to."



So, as recently as a year ago, I was still playing tabletop Dungeons and Dragons. The specificity of D&D games is what makes them attractive; with enough creativity (and a great Dungeon Master), you can improvise your way through any conceivable situation. Want to keep attacking that Orc's kneecap? With D&D, you can. Even when the Orc is dead. Even after a week has passed. Your DM might raise his eyebrow, but hell: It's your story.

The lure of western Role Playing Video Games is that they often try to replicate this experience -- emulating that unbridled freedom seems to be the singular focus of RPGs developed outside of Asia. Japanese Role Playing Games, conversely, seem designed to drive the player down a very stylish corridor, with heavily emphasis on authorial control. JRPGS are a story that's told to you, whereas WRPGS are a world that you investigate.

And Fallout 3 is a world that is worth investigating.

Fallout 3 is grand and addictive. Like Oblivion before it, you can pretty much do anything. Wanna run around the world collecting empty whiskey bottles? Go for it. Wanna save a town from certain destruction, only to prowl it at night pickpocketing the residents? You're free to. The scale of your freedom is overwhelming and intimidating, and like Oblivion it is easy to get sidetracked near-permanently. That freedom leads to a very personal adventure, but it can also be difficult to manage. In fact, sometimes it can be horrible.

For gamers looking for hundreds of hours of details to investigate, Fallout 3 will be a blooming reward. But for enthusiasts hungry for direction, Fallout 3 will leave them longing. A game like this is impossible to review as a *story*, since each player's journey will be so specific to their play-style. The game could be a story of redemption, or it may be a slow descent into madness. For you, it could be the story of an ignoble mercenary, or a steadfast hero. For me, it was about a thief with a conscience. I'm a big fan of John Woo movies, after all.

The wasteland is now your home.

But what will be consistent for every gamer are the game elements; the tools with which they craft their tale. Here are my complaints:

Though more stylish than Oblivion, this engine remains ugly. I know this is a post-apocalyptic world, but there's no reason that every character needs to be so thoughtlessly bland. What's more, character interactions draw the NPCs directly to the center of the screen -- and as any high-school film-maker knows, this is the worst place to put someone for dialogue. The effect, after only a few hours, is deadening.

Quests are often very vague. "Go find this person," is a depressing charge when you have sixteen square miles to cover. Some quests are highly directed; others are wide-open. Rather than lending a sense of variety to the game, the open-ended quests often get lost among the more directed missives. I don't particularly want to kill and collect eight of some kind of creature, but since I know exactly what the quest entails, you'd better believe I'm going to tackle it first.

Fast Travel is a necessary (and included) feature, but its very existence describes a fundamental weakness of the game: Terrain. This game should be fun to traverse. It should be interesting, varied, and unique. Heading from one location to another should be a joy; if I found myself in a post-nuclear Los Angeles, I'd be open-eyed through the whole journey. Fast Travel means that something is wrong. Nobody wants to warp to the end of a level in Sonic the Hedgehog, because moving *through* the world *is* the game. If travel isn't the game here, then what is? Combat? Don't include travel at all unless you're going to make it a living part of the world. If there is something in your game that you can skip, edit it out. Or make it more interesting.

There. Now, for what works.

Fallout 3 is compelling because it has a sense of humor, some great locations, and an extraordinary combat system (that sometimes, regrettably, gets a little tedious). The V.A.T.S system is a functional marriage of first-person action and the calculation of Dungeons and Dragons. Selecting between your personal skill as a gamer and the character's skill with a weapon is fresh stuff.

And man, those explosions are graphic. They're gore-geous.

Fallout 3 works because of the morbid curiosity we have for a ruined version of our world. Fallout 3 succeeds because of the way it delivers the story to us -- for those who haven't played another Fallout game, there's nothing to fear; it's never unexplained, it's just subtle. The first time you figure out what happened to DC may be the first time you equip a Chinese sub-machinegun. That's greatly appreciated.

But most of all, Fallout 3 succeeds because it's trying so hard. There's so many missteps in the game, but all of them are welcome attempts. I'd rather have hundreds of hours of *Dark City*'s than the inevitable obviousness of a Summer Blockbuster. Fallout may not always fly, but when it does, you're proud of it.

parting shot

I didn't mention how gray the game is, but I'm sure you get an idea from the screen-shots. The palette here will be used to describe an entire generation of video-games in future university courses for "Games' Studies" majors. Man, why couldn't I go to college twenty years from now? Oh, right. Parting Shot. Go get Fallout 3.

System: Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Rare | **Publisher:** Microsoft | **Multi:** Co-op and competitive multi-player, blueprint sharing | **ESRB:** E | **Available:** November 11

Banjo Kazooie: Nuts and Bolts

You'd have to be nuts to pass this up

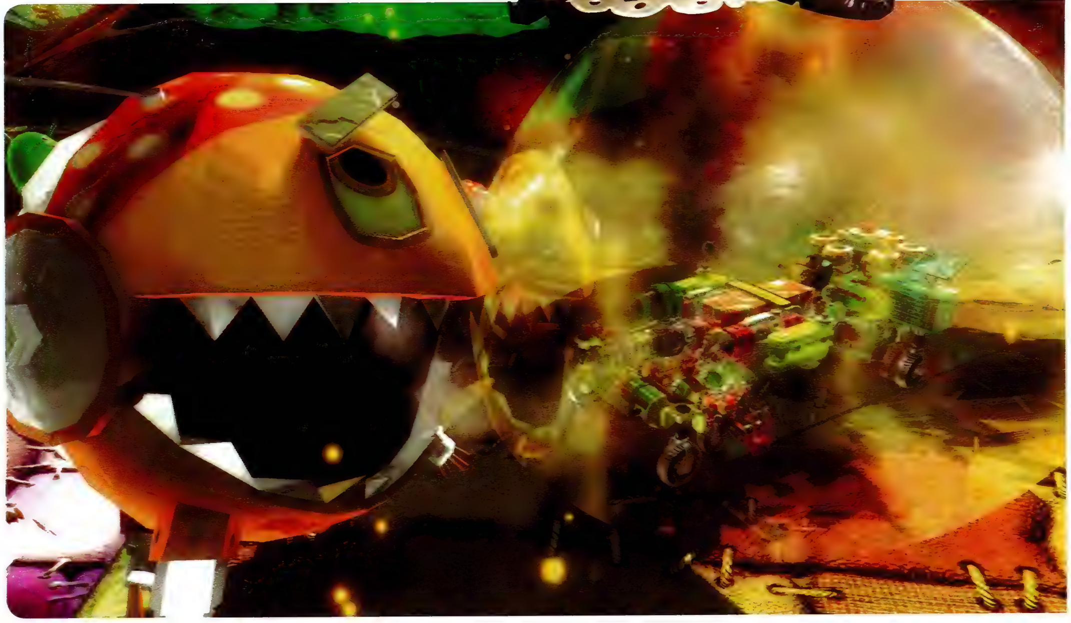
words Dave Halverson

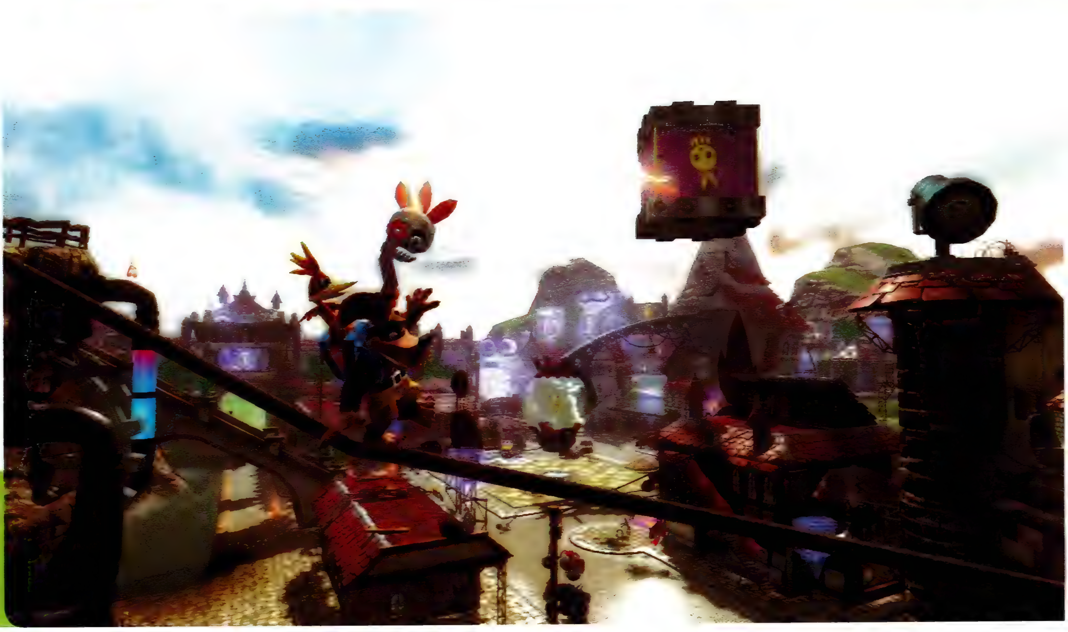
If Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts is Rare's answer to capturing broader audience without chasing their core fans away, all I can say is what I always say: Rare are simply in a class by themselves. They're every bit the maestros they were when style and technique defined a studio or publisher, if not more so. They just really know how to make really great games their way, period. And their way happens to be the epitome of solid, tight, perfectly-tuned gameplay within pristine, handmade storybook environments.

With Nuts & Bolts, which is the first and only game of its kind, Rare make a bold statement, swinging the door wide open for skilled gamers within a game that a three-year-old can play. That's the beauty of Nuts and Bolts—but also the reason it's nearly impossible to review. Because the game becomes whatever the user wants it to become, all I can really comment on is the workmanship, which is impeccable as usual; the visuals, which are breathtaking; the value, which is immeasurable; and my personal take on the whole "have-it-your-way" format.

At our house Nuts & Bolts pulls double duty. I play to advance; clearing missions about 50 percent of the time; exploring 30 percent of the time and building the rest. I like to stockpile parts, then spend an hour building what I like to think appears engineered. Once I build a vehicle, whether it's for protection, flight, speed, passengers, raw power, or brute force, I commit. I also like to explore because Rare keeps surprising me. I've managed to get on top of so many structures by way of rooftops and stacking within Showdown Town, and within the worlds—the more I explore and play the more I can't stop myself. I have planes, helicopters, watercraft, motorcycles, cars, trucks, and some vehicles they don't have names for, and nothing is held down; it's like a gigantic world of toys and props, and there are no barriers. I like running my trolley into Grunty too, especially when she's drawing nasty pictures of Banjo and Kazooie. Of course I want another Rare platformer, badly. Jet Force Gemini, Kameo, Conker, or Battletoads (if the license isn't tied up) would make my century. Or what if they made a game like Nuts & Bolts, only centered on platforming worlds rather than vehicles? Then they could make a world for each! Now that would be something.

In the meantime though, I'm just glad they're still making games their way. The other gamer in our house, by the way, my eight-year-old son Hunter, who's way





Check directly above the Jiggy bank too.

> "With Nuts & Bolts, which is the first and only game of its kind, Rare make a bold statement, swinging the door wide open for skilled gamers within a game that a three-year-old can play."

too good at games for his age, would starve if we didn't tear him away from Mumbo's Garage. I suppose a lot of kids, especially given the popularity of Legos and Bionicles, will become mad builders in Nuts and Bolts. There's a real art to it, especially when you get into some junior aeronautics, and having the test facility right there is great, along with the paint shop. Then of course, there's the Lord of Games—aka LOG—who's always bragging about his game worlds and reminding us how things used to be (he created the FPS you know); the many shops and establishments to visit—maybe play a little N64 Banjo or get a workout—and all of the elaborate gear-works and constructs around town to forage for parts and Jiggy's. And if that ever gets boring you can always play the game (there's a big one in here) or there's always Grunty, Klungo (Klungo's good now by the way), Boggy, Pikelet, Mr. Fit, Jolly Dodger and an entire town full of bi-pedal rhinos, pigs, and other strange creatures to annoy and harass, and that are always more than happy to reciprocate.

parting **shot**

Nuts & Bolts is one massive gaming smorgasbord. Fly, hover, float, swim, race, mingle, explore, build, experiment… Showdown Town and the brilliant and vivid worlds it houses are yours for the taking however you see fit. Bear and bird included. Simply in a class by itself.

System: PC, 360, PS3 | **Developer:** Crystal Dynamics | **Publisher:** Eidos | **ESRB:** T | **Available:** November 18

Tomb Raider: Underworld

High adventure

words Brady Fiechter

One of the earlier tasks in Tomb Raider: Underworld is to essentially pull a lever and open a door. A few minutes later, Lara grabs a block and drops it on a pressure plate, which opens up another door. I was instantly in love. Crystal Dymanics does an admirable job of paying subtle homage to the spirit of Tomb Raider, and then it just takes off to unexpected heights from there.

Tomb Raider: Underworld does stick to the basics, because the basics still work remarkably well when they're handled with the kind of vision and skill that marks Lara's latest adventure.

The more obvious mechanics that stay true to the series are here, but there's never a sense of laziness or stilted progression. Familiarity in the game is part of its deceptive charm, and the farther you get through the game, the more you see just how far Crystal Dynamics has taken Tomb Raider in newer, spectacular directions.

If you've been following the series from the start, through the ups and the downs, your relationship with this game will be that much more emboldened as you begin to discover how dramatically the Lara character has evolved in this eighth adventure. The motion-captured movement is impressive, but the growing appreciation for what the designers do with that visual attraction isn't properly realized at first. Lara's fundamental move set is still fairly familiar—jump, grapple, flip, shimmy—but the acrobatics become an intoxicating, stylistic affair as much as a straight gameplay device when your skills are put to their highest test. The game has been designed to maintain a keen sense of realism, grounding Lara in a sensible reality while still maintaining the fantasy of an exotic, wild adventure. She feels wonderfully engaging wall jumping up a tight corridor or leaping from the precarious balance on a poll, casting a web of tactile control that doesn't just look cool, it feels cool. The intricacy and transmission of movement around such a magnificently constructed space is what defines Tomb Raider: Underworld as peerless. (Mirror's Edge hints at this in the first-person; a game I love for similar reasons.)

I've never liked Lara that much as a character, but here she becomes less plastic and more soul, partly because of a mostly sensible design that looks great with technology and artistry, and surprisingly from a story that begins to humanize her and better frame her place in the world. The broad search for Thor's Hammer takes the game into more serious territory; let's call it darker territory, a simple and obvious description for a story that isn't really that much more but does work on a satisfying pitch. Big praise goes to the smooth integration of story beats into gameplay beats, which elegantly anchors the immersion through the passive narrative to the active settings.

If there is a more visually appealing game this year, I haven't seen it. Production design hinges on picky personal appeal in games more than any other medium, and with Tomb Raider: Underworld's choice to balance a

"Tomb Raider: Underworld does stick to the basics, because the basics still work remarkably well when they're handled with the kind of vision and skill that marks Lara's latest adventure."

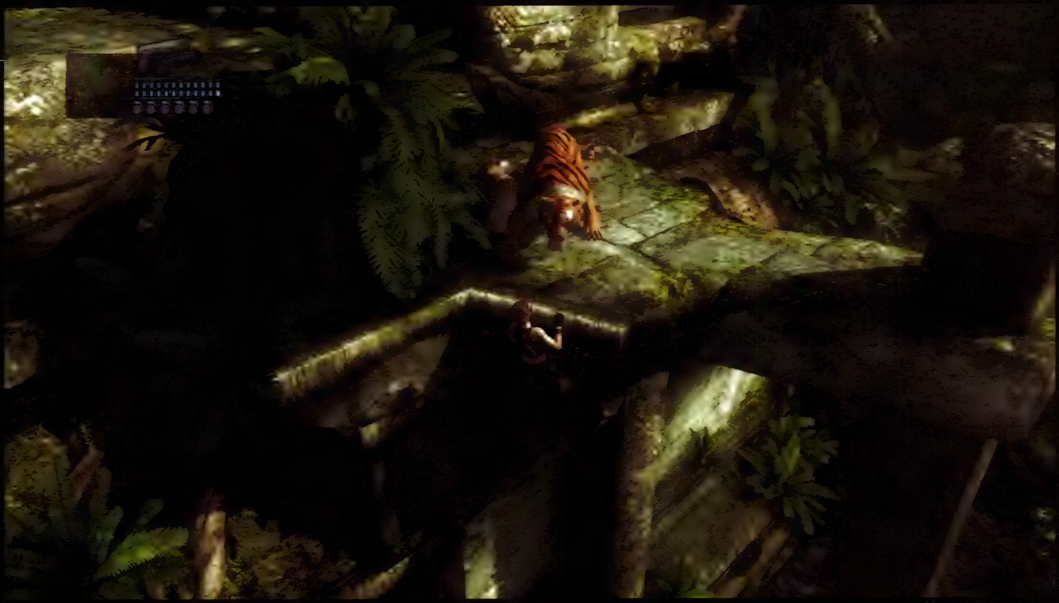
natural, realistic beauty with exceptional tones of exaggerated fantasy, I am in love with this world. And the real attraction is that you get to play on it, over it, around it, move pieces into place and affect its path. The game space is demanding at times, asking that you really come to grips with the mechanics and prepare for puzzles that encompass entire areas. The designers don't tread lightly, taking the adventure qualities as far as they've gone in Tomb Raider while slowly and methodically bathing you in wonderful surprises and mystery. The game is so good at winding you back to a beginning point while opening up new arteries, continually creating a sense of a place that really does exist. Spaces become larger and darker, lighter and smaller, back and forth, all in a natural progression that owes much to the idea of a richly calibrated movie structure.

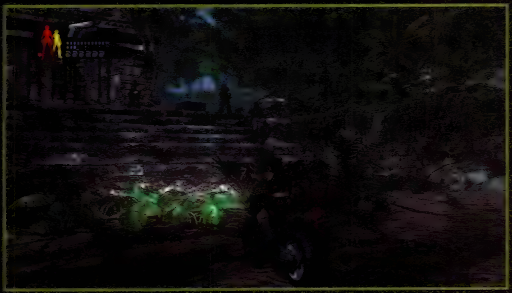
And wouldn't you know it, the action is merely OK. On a cynical day I might say I kind of dislike it in moments, but its place becomes better served the later you get through the game. Learn to work with the acrobatics of Lara within the lock-on combat foundation and it can be fun, but at times shootouts call attention to the artifice of the world when Lara gets caught up in spots where her movements become jarring.

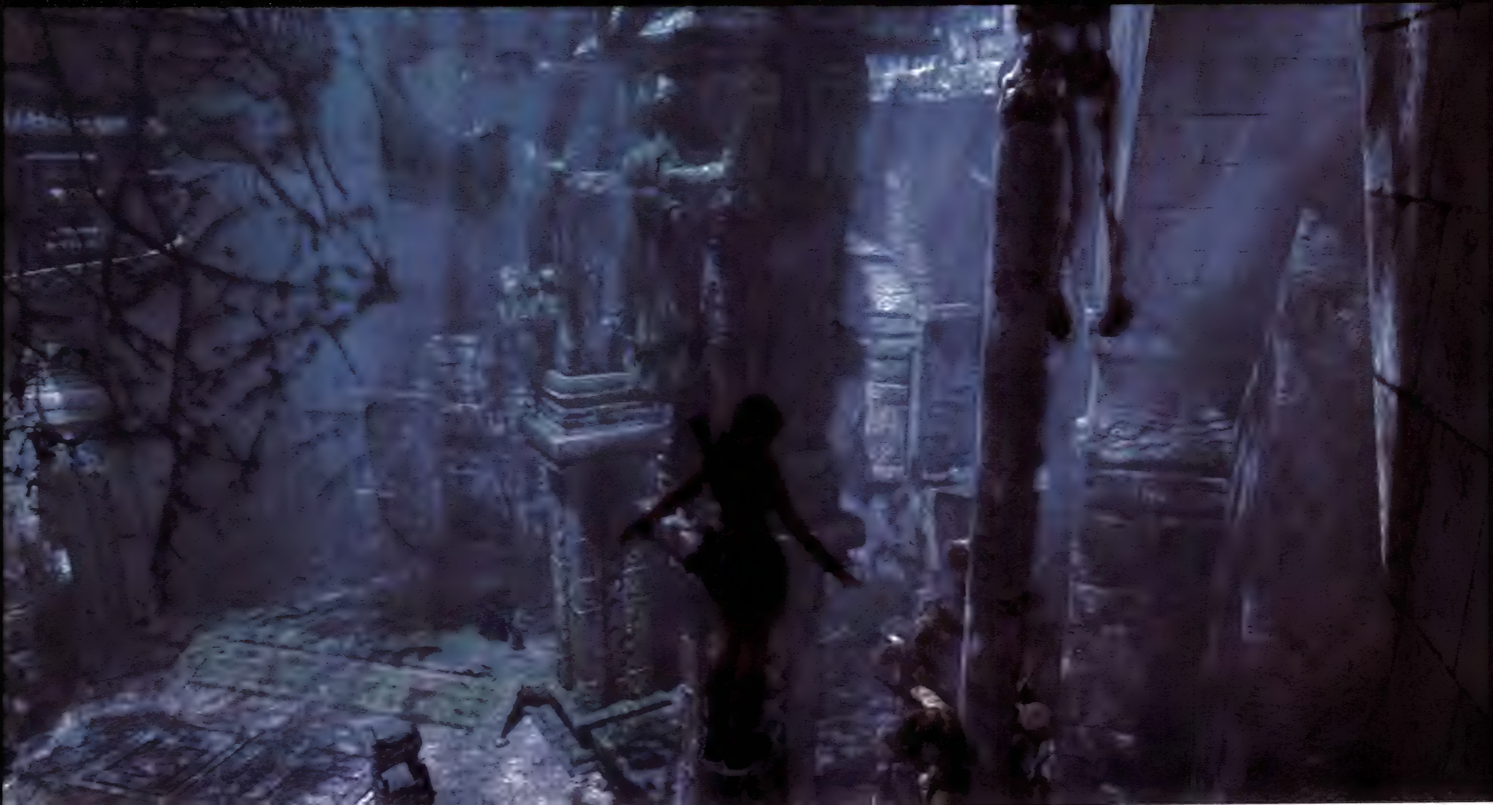
Perhaps obligation brings me to mention that Lara can hang and shoot, rides a motorcycle that involves deeper gameplay elements, can shoot while locked on two targets at once. That's all nice and will make people happy that Crystal Dynamics has added some more dimension to the Tomb Raider template, but the soul of the game is still what gets me, and all that removed would have done nothing to diminish those times I was a little moved by Tomb Raider: Underworld.

parting **shot**

Tomb Raider at its best. Absolutely love it or leave it. I absolutely love it.







System: PS3 | **Developer:** Sega WOW | **Publisher:** Sega | **ESRB:** Teen | **Available:** Now

Valkyria Chronicles

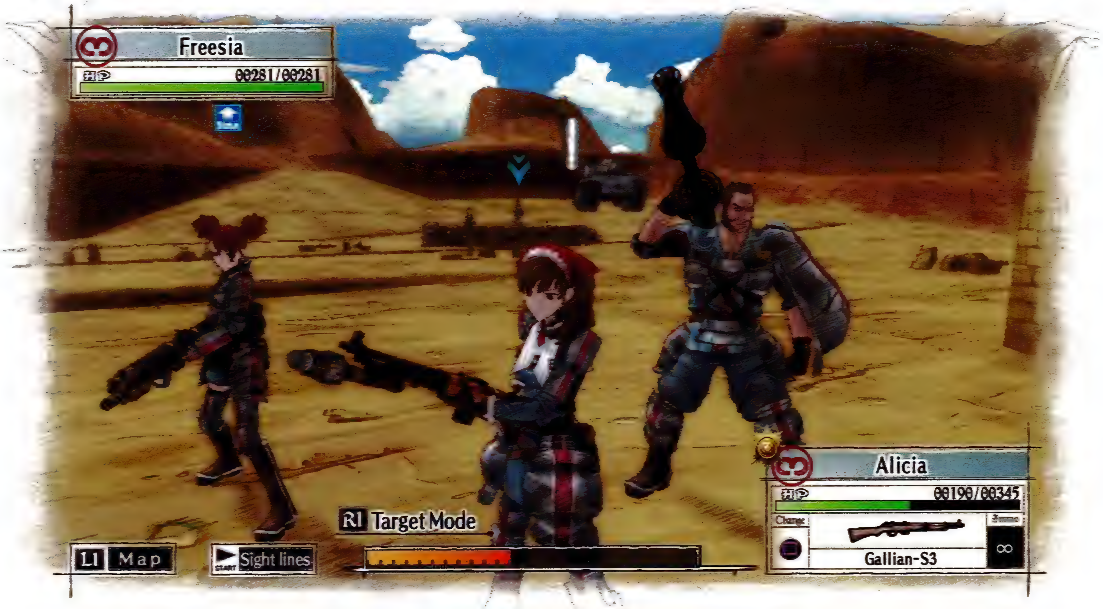
A war of nations, immortals, and a burly cross-dresser named Jann

words Casey Loe

Valkyria Chronicles is the greatest thing to happen to strategy games since Yasumi Matsuno reinvented the genre with the one-two punch of Tactics Ogre and Final Fantasy Tactics. Whether Valkyria Chronicles will be so easily and so frequently mimicked remains to be seen—the basic ideas at the heart of its battle system may be simple to copy, but the polished and satisfying execution are at a level that imitators would be hard-pressed to match.

Valkyria Chronicles begins like a typical turn-based strategy game: you place units of various classes on a map, and are given a limited pool of command points that you can spend on moving them each turn. But whenever you take control of a unit, what had appeared to be a hand-drawn map reveals itself to be a cleverly textured 3D world, and the camera zooms down from a birds-eye view to land just behind your chosen unit. You can then move that soldier as you would a character in a third-person action game, side-stepping landmines and dashing from one bit of cover to the next. The rest of the units on the battlefield remain frozen in place, but can still turn to pepper your character with interception fire. Once per action, you can draw a weapon and fire back, strategically aiming for deadly but less accurate headshots, or opting to destroy an enemy's cover with a carefully thrown grenade.

Valkyria Chronicles has all the depth of a conventional strategy game, but immerses the player much more deeply in its quest by putting them directly into the shoes of their troops as they aim that crucial headshot or make a mad dash through a field of fire to save a fallen comrade. (In a brilliantly dramatic touch, slain units can be saved if you can reach them with an ally before they bleed out.) These action elements don't attempt to provide the tension of a true shooter—the world freezes while you aim and there's no mistaking the fact that digital dice are being rolled to determine the accuracy of your shots. But whenever you manage to sneak behind an unawares foe for a fatal headshot, or carefully position a machinegun blast to gun down two soldiers in a single clip, Valkyria Chronicles dishes up a level of visceral thrill that is completely new to the genre. It also allows the game to bring battlefield gimmicks to life in a way that had never been possible before. For example, instead of providing a numerical stat reduction to accuracy, a smoke grenade provides a realistic cloud of white smoke that you can run through to keep enemies



from tracking you, but which forces you to fire at indistinct shadows that you can only hope are the silhouettes of your foes. The behind-the-hero perspective also provides a visual impact that would never be possible in a game with an overhead view—bosses are not merely six hexagons worth of tank in the middle of a battlefield map, but appear instead as towering gargantuans that blot out the sky.

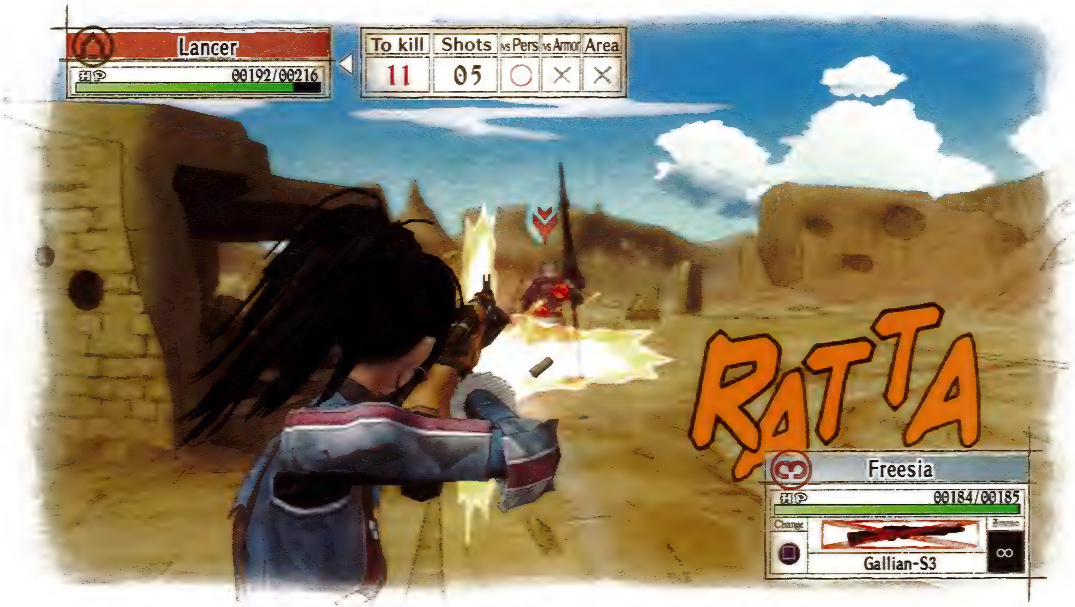
Of course, the visual impact of Valkyria would be lost if the game didn't look as good as it does. As you can see, the developers have gone with a unique texturing style that attempts to make the game look like a moving manga, with pencil-sketch outlines, watercolor textures, and sound effects like "Boom!" that appear as letters on the screen. It's a strikingly original look, and lends itself to some very cool effects, like the way dead characters fade from 3D models into crude, uncolored pencil sketches.

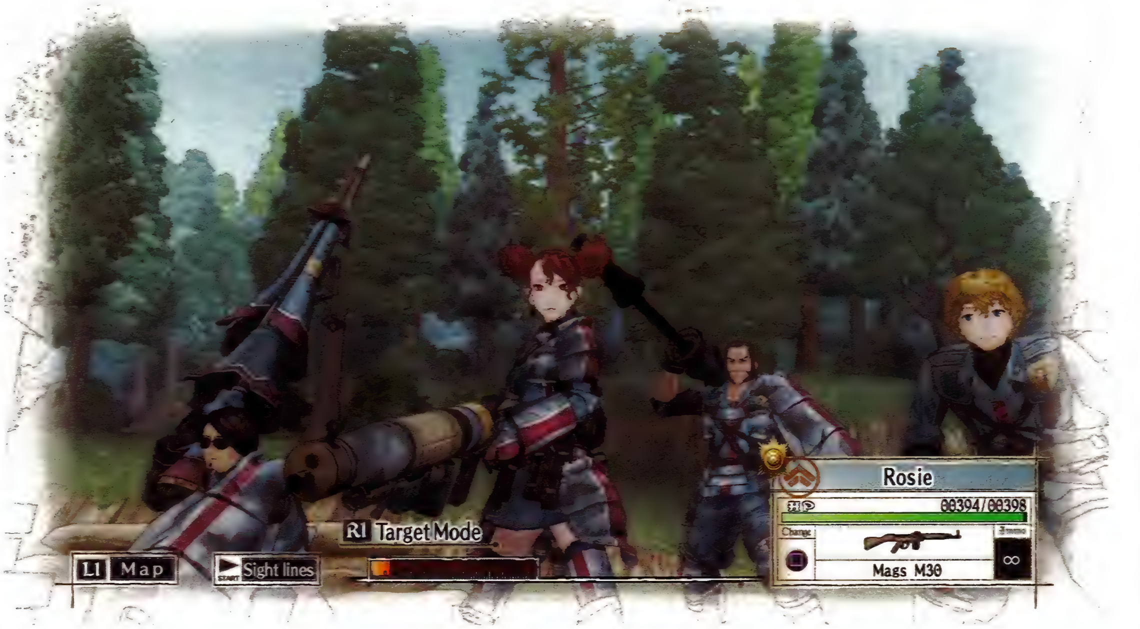
Valkyria Chronicle's 1930's wartime aesthetic makes for a flavorful story, if not exactly a riveting one. The 50 or so characters you can recruit for your squad aren't hardened soldiers, but citizen militiamen and militiawomen drafted from careers as farmers, bakers, exotic dancers and tavern singers. Sadly, the tepid romance between the game's boring lead characters and a subplot in which a character learns An Important Lesson About Racism (spoiler: it's *wrong*) compose the brunt of the game's several hours of overwritten event scenes. But it is fun to unlock the latter parts of each of your recruits' character profiles, and the in-game dialogue allows the personalities of even the most minor members of your squad to shine through. The voice acting is generally good, and the script is—shockingly—full of things an actual human being might actually say. For example, when troubled-loner sniper Marina activates her Extra Shot ability, she doesn't yell "EXTRA SHOT!!!" in some high-pitched anime-girl voice, but instead whispers ominously, "the hunt continues." Cameos from the entire cast of Skies of Arcadia (which was made by the same team) make for another nice touch.

Not content to introduce an entirely new sub-genre and visual look to the world, the development team has also taken their outside-the-box creativity to all of the game's equipment and character-leveling systems, with less successful results. Characters are distinguished from each other only by a few stats (which are mostly hidden) and a slate of abilities known as Potentials, which provide bonuses and penalties under certain circumstances. There are as many good Potentials as bad ones (such as allergies and phobias), and when you unlock a character's final Potential it's just as likely to be a liability as it is a boon. The goal is a noble one, encouraging players to rotate their armies frequently instead of maxing out a few chosen soldiers. But the combination of unconventional mechanics and a clumsy interface makes keeping track of such things unnecessarily confusing. It requires several button presses to even pull up a description of each Potential, and good luck trying to remember what exactly the "Aichmophoic" Potential does in the middle of a battle. The interface is equally awful at other things—I was probably 20 hours into the game before I figured out how to equip my troops with the rare weapons that are awarded for killing enemy aces.

> "Valkyria Chronicles dishes up a level of visceral thrill that is completely new to the genre."

Chronicles feels a little messy off of the battlefield, but the 20 or so battles that compose the main campaign are so perfectly tuned that the other aspects of the game barely register. Each new battle introduces some sort of mechanic or twist, keeping the campaign from ever feeling routine. Valkyria Chronicles hits its greatest highs in a handful of powerfully dramatic boss encounters, which rank among the most memorable of any game I've ever played, in any genre. These battles are particularly tough, but the ability to save at any point mid-battle keeps the frustration level down, and the option to farm for money and experience points in optional skirmishes ensures that you'll never get in over your head.



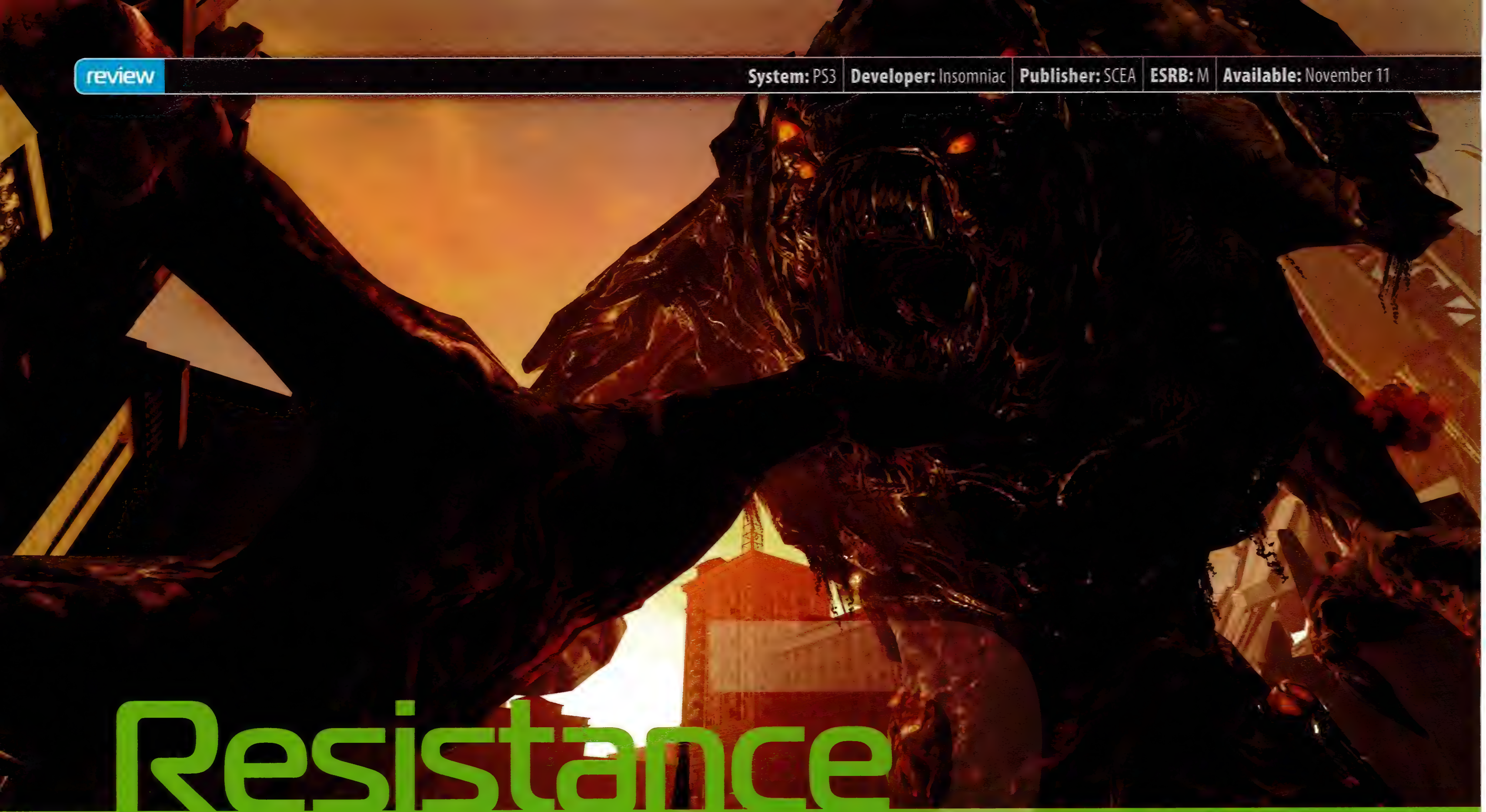


Even if its radical new take on the strategy genre doesn't appeal to you, anyone with a passionate interest in games ought to give Valkyria Chronicles a spin. Its ideas and visual style are both legitimately revolutionary, and are certain to inspire other games for years to come. I can only pray that one of those games is Valkyria Chronicles 2, because no original IP from this generation deserves a sequel more.

parting shot

Valkyria Chronicles is a landmark title that, sadly, may be too far out of the mainstream to reap the success it deserves. With its unique visual style and inspired mix of real-time action with turn-based strategy, it's easily one of the most creative games of this hardware generation. Oh, and it's damn fun, too.

System: PS3 | **Developer:** Insomniac | **Publisher:** SCEA | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** November 11



Resistance 2

Death to the heartland

words Brady Fiechter

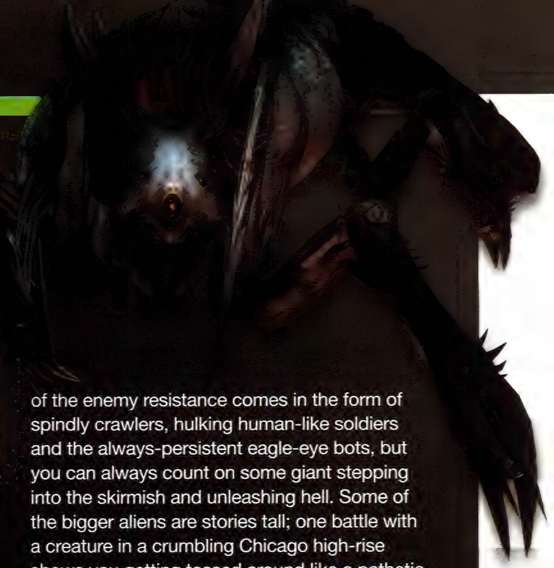
There is something to be said about a gaming experience that relies on smaller ideas and more intimate settings, and there is something to be said about games like Resistance 2 that take the idea of scale to the extreme. The game establishes the continuation of the war between man and Chimera throughout the gorgeous west to America's heartland and beyond, handing you the plight of Nathan Hale, infected soldier who is out with a team of other mutating squad members to slice into the heart of the alien force. The game feels big and powerful and epic the moment you pick up the first gun and set out to leave Iceland for the war in America.

This is better sequel all around, and it starts with that first gun. It feels better to kill, better to strategize, better to navigate the battlegrounds. Only two guns can be carried at once; each one serves a very specific, nicely delineated purpose, with a tactile pop that drops the enemy convincingly and with the kind of satisfaction that defines the best first-person experiences.

The enemy is often aggressive and in your face, cloaked aliens snarling from the darkness, spindly aliens bum-rushing in packs. The game relies too much on the same trick, but when that trick works the adrenaline is on full throttle. For the long-distance shootouts, a few old weapons return and a few new ones join the excellent assortment, like the personal favorite Marksman that blasts out intermittent bursts that drop the Chimera with sudden force. It's an awesome head-shot gun.

Insomniac has always crafted extremely polished, technically impressive, mechanically creative games, but these talented developers have never relied that much on mood to enhance the experience. In some ways, Resistance 2 is a more memorable first-person shooter than Resistance: Fall of Man because of the stronger moments of suspense and creep, which work alongside a sense of wonder that occasionally sets a powerful scene. Exiting a subterranean march into a frightening and beautiful San Francisco sky line, suffocated by attacking Chimera forces, is a big highlight in awe; sneaking past floating patrol drones in a shadowy labyrinth of tunnels is a contrasting stretch of intimate unease.

The game is fantastic at contrasting spaces and gameplay pitch, moving from small-scale battles and stretches of abandoned quiet to all-out assaults with massive alien forces. Most of the enemy resistance comes in the form of spindly crawlers, hulking human-like soldiers and the always-persistent eagle-eye bots, but you can always count on some giant stepping into the skirmish and unleashing hell. Some of the bigger aliens are stories tall; one battle with a creature in a crumbling Chicago high-rise shows you getting tossed around like a pathetic mouse, as you fight to land rockets inside a mouth that could devour a tank with one chomp. It's a blast to contend with these bigger threats, and Insomniac balances just enough between difficult strategy and visual payoff to make the threats convincing and exciting.



Death is bloodier and chunkier than the modest depictions in Resistance: Fall of Man. This is a fairly violent game, framing moments of dismemberment and flying body parts, yet there's never a point where the game reaches beyond tame amusement. It might be a little unfair to call Insomniac's approach to their violence as timid, but Resistance 2 would have been a weightier adventure with a bit more harsh realism. The narrative demands it.

One of the standout qualities in Resistance 2 is its world of hopeless peril, an America that feels choked to the point of oblivion by the alien invasion. In the eery emptiness of an Idaho rural-farm community, a radio show speaks of the end of the world while you witness it first-hand, navigating pod after pod of gestating humans inside homes; rotten bodies from an apparent suicide lie on a bed. Eventually you fight in the belly of a ship thousands of feet above the flat planes of crops underneath, moving forward to the next city that offers a new set of horrors. It's epic and sprawling, a superb blending of gameplay beats with the cinematic.

"It feels better to kill, better to strategize, better to navigate the battlegrounds."

On one hand all this is great stuff, yet on the other there are times of inconsistency, and the game ultimately ends up feeling as if there was a missed opportunity for greatness. The ending is abrupt, exposing the limp core of the story as you walk away. But know that you'll walk away thoroughly entertained by one heck of a sequel.

parting shot

Somebody shut those bloody squad members up, or remove them altogether; shoddy AI there is distracting. One of a few blemishes on a game that is wonderfully stylized, a blast to play, filled with original settings, and a great sequel all around. Note: I had limited experience with multiplayer.

System: Wii
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
ESRB: Teen
Multi: Vs
Available: November 18

Castlevania Judgment

Verdict: Guilty of Disappointment

words Heather Campbell

Castlevania Judgement is terrible.

Now, the idea of a free-roaming one-on-one fighting game is fundamentally interesting. For those who still light a candle for the Dreamcast every morning, we're somewhat familiar with the concept; after all, we had Power Stone.

But Power Stone wasn't very serious. It was fluff. Some of us might recall PlayStation One's Bushido Blade, another innovative yet flawed attempt at a free-running fighting game. But what we're trying to describe is something like Devil May Cry, but against your best friend.

I would argue that the very first thing this game would need would be lock-on targeting. The second thing it would need would be an ability to parry after-or-during blocking. The final element of this free-running fighting game would be precise, snappy control.

Castlevania Judgement has none of these things.

Takeshi Obata, the well-known designer for anime darling Death Note, provides character art for Castlevania Judgement, the first fighting game in the Castlevania series. Some fans have complained that the art looks unfamilar -- personally, I love it. It's a real shame Judgement isn't a better game, to take advantage of the design. Obata is wasted here.

You know, we love Castlevania games here at Play. We forgive the theatrical trappings of the series because, well, that's the atmosphere. And to be very clear: We aren't upset that Castlevania Judgement isn't a side-scrolling action-platformer; it's very exciting to see the series branch out. We're upset because this new Castlevania game shows a real lack of ... Judgement.

In addition to the aforementioned oversights (no targeting, no parry/defensive comebacks, and rubbery Wii-mote based controls), the game's camera is unreliable at best, spinning around characters during combat to make targeting more difficult than it already is. The game is a little bit like trying to feed a wet otter on a Tilt-a-Whirl. Plugging in your Classic Controller doesn't help, and neither does the optional GameCube controller scheme, though both of these are preferable to the waggling, imprecise Wiimote.

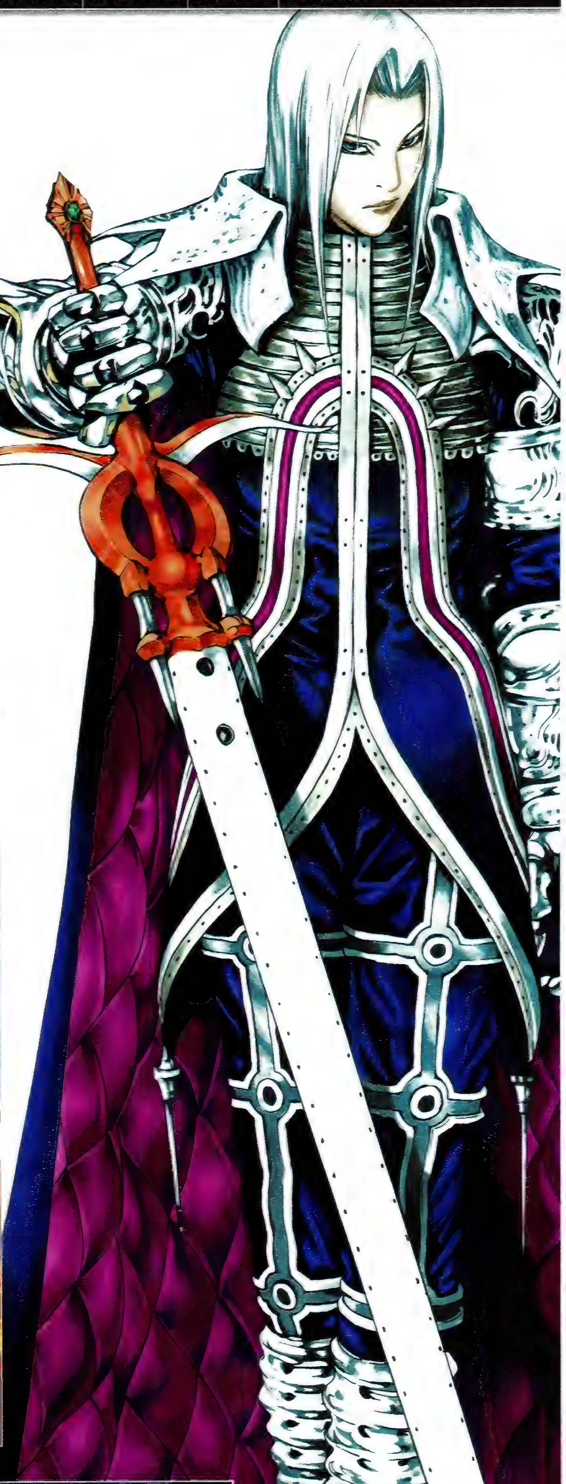
You might enjoy the title if you're a unapologetic Castlevaniac—the kind that just wants access to the characters, regardless of the context. If you've ever purchased a knock-off notebook featuring a logo from Symphony of the Night, this might be your bag. Hell, the roster includes heroes and villains from all throughout the series, including Shanoa and Aeon if you've purchased the DS game Order of Ecclesia (linking the games unlocks the characters). It's nice to see them all piling on one another, Dissidia/Kingdom Hearts style. I guess.

The voice acting, on the other hand, is ridiculous ... but what can we really expect? At least that's the one thing that's consistent with the rest of the series.

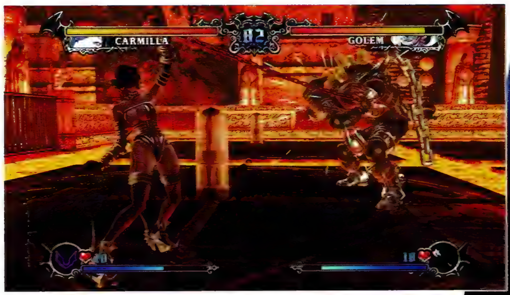
"We're upset because this new Castlevania game shows a real lack of, well, Judgement."

parting shot

We applaud the series for taking a risk, but ... that's about all we can applaud here.



TREVOR
76
CARMILLA
20



SHANOA
66
DEATH
0
10

TREVOR
27
DEATH
30
10

System: PS2, Wii (reviewed) | **Developer:** Blitz Games | **Publisher:** THQ | **ESRB:** E | **Available:** Now

Tak and the Guardians of Gross

Shadow of the Takolossus

words Dave Halverson

You never hear much about Tak games. Unless you're one of the millions of kids (or their parents) who watch him on Nickelodeon TV and DVD, or a holdover from the series' many art-soaked PS2, Xbox and GameCube adventures, developed by Avalanche, you might not even know who Tak is. Trust me though—if you own a Wii it may be time to find out. I say "may be" because unless you like cartoon-based antics (the themes include slime, cheese, stink, and other foulness) and platforming mixed with parkour running, you should probably pass, unless you just wanna' see what your Wii can do.

Tak begins innocently enough with the usual training level, but then something unexpected happens after Tak accidentally unleashes four "Grosstocities." After a brief but entertaining chase level and the first Guardians mini-game, Blitz Games breaks out the first giant, and I mean really giant. Imagine a Shadow of Colossus beast a few times the size of Howl's Moving Castle. They're so big, in fact, that once you're *on* them (climbing and using Tak's corresponding magic to open the way) you go *into* them and do battle against the parasites that live within them as you make your way to the sweet spot: a piece of the crystal that Tak shattered to unleash them. Based on the tiny bit of training-area gameplay THQ showed us way back when, and a general lack of interest in promoting it further, I expected the worst, so the sight of ultra-high-dollar looking Wii tech caught me by surprise. Granted, the game is on the simple side, although far less so if you turn the voice all the way down (Tak will drive you insane otherwise) along with the prompts and subtitles (ah, that's better), but it's also gooey good fun on an epic scale and looks like a million dang dollars.

The core gameplay is good fast parkour running and platforming intermingled with clever theme-based play mechanics as you conquer each "Big-G." There are action riddles to solve, magic to cast, and plenty of tactics to devour—Tak can wall run, wall-to-wall jump, edge climb, winch, grind rails, zip line, and attack with the Juju Boom—but it's all fairly straightforward. In between, the mini-game challenges (rights of passage from the Guardians of Gross) driving and especially chase levels (a la Sega arcade games like Jurassic Park) are sticky good fun. What grabbed me though were the leviathans. The sight of the first one, Trashthulu, wandering by in real-time, definitely piqued my interest, but by the time I reached the final battle inside its mouth I was more curious than anything (shame THQ didn't have a single screen or art asset beyond level one to show it, and time didn't allow me to screen capture). What I want to know is, how does this little budget game look so good? And if Blitz Games can do this on a *budget*, what can they do on Wii with a license? Somebody ought to find out.

parting **shot**

Tak and the Guardians of Gross will get creamed by reviewers who would never touch it so you'll have to take my word for it: if you like cartoon platformers this is an exceptional one, especially for the price. It's not a God of War or Shadow of the Colossus—it's just a funny little Nick game impersonating one.

> "Tak begins innocently enough with the usual training level, but then something unexpected happens..."

P1 Score:
24000
43

Hope you like your mini-games with extra cheese.

System: Xbox 360, PS3, PC | **Developer:** Spark Unlimited | **Publisher:** Gamecock | **Multi:** 16p animus wars | **ESRB:** M | **Available:** Now

Legendary

The script called for werewolves

A clear violation of the leash law.

words Mike Griffin

Besides historic military shooters, there's probably no form of FPS better suited to heavily scripted campaigns than the horror shooter. With a cast of detailed mythological creatures and gore-flaying modern weaponry, Spark Unlimited's Legendary falls into this category, offering a blend of precisely-paced event triggering and monster mashing spectacle. Though beset by several lamentable design gaffs and forgettable characters, Legendary duly honors the essentials of run and gunning, extreme creature slaying and towering boss encounters.

The protagonist in Legendary is Charles Deckard, an art thief in a bad suit that was tricked into stealing the one and only Pandora's Box. His contractor, the double-crossing Ormond LeFey, powers-up the ancient relic and unleashes a scourge of mythological creatures. It's up to Deckard (who bears a magical signet irrevocably linked to the box) and a paramilitary team to banish the monstrous horde and eliminate LeFey. The in-game presentation of Legendary's inescapably clichéd narrative is merely passable, a mix of forgettable in-engine cuts, between mission still frames, and the usual objectives chatter and evil leader gloating, here with serviceable VO performances.

So the resulting plot breakdown across Legendary's ten or so hours of campaign is pretty lacklustre. It's good, then, that the game laces up its boots for some mindless monster ass kicking. The Box escapees include the likes of werewolves, lava spawns, dark fairies, blood spiders, minotaurs and gryphons, each with damage and location vulnerabilities (from werewolf decapitations to nailing the mino's back after it misses a bull charge). These creatures are generally tough and engaging to fight as they fly, scamper up and down walls, hurl fireballs, possess objects, and plow through stone pillars. Bad guy humans from the Black Order demonstrate decent cover fire moves and flanking AI, but it's not hard to lure the poor fools into a hallway or stairwell and mow them down with an assault rifle as they round the corner. Toss a napalm grenade into the mix and let the gods sort them out.

> "...massive boss encounters like the Junk Golem in Times Square or the Kraken battle in London."

Legendary looks and sounds about as good as Turning Point, Spark's last effort. It's a mixed bag. Partly because the game's level design is so deliberately hemmed in (a symptom of its unwavering point-to-point event triggering), with contrived guides like ugly rows of car wreckage to coddle you along, the overall quality of the terrain and world suffers. The Unreal Engine 3 nonetheless flexes its rendering might in massive boss encounters like the Junk Golem in Times Square or the Kraken battle in London, and Spark shows off stunning parallax mapped textures and beautiful skylines in the Cathedral level. Monster and infantry models are copiously normal-mapped and well animated, while weapon sounds and enemy wails are punchy and satisfying.

Otherwise, Legendary is quite self-defeating. The game has inconsistent physics effects and minimal perspective care. Exhibit A: invincible light bulbs. This ranks right up there with floating torso perspective rendering, another sin Legendary is guilty of. Dear developers: An exposed light bulb should shatter and dim; it's an expected behavior that this engine can easily afford. And when a player looks down they should see their character's lower limbs. When a player climbs a ladder, they should see grasping hands. There's no drawback; it's a 100% positive impact. Please connect your FPS hero to their world.

Many unpleasant continue checkpoints. There's a lame door hacking mechanism that uses Deckard's signet magic, and somehow the designers thought it would be fun to place checkpoints right before nothing-important-on-the-other-side hackable doors, over and over again. Or checkpoints just seconds before unskippable cutscenes. Yeah, players *love* that. Melee attacks hit you through solid metal doors, fire effects seep through concrete walls, and fallen enemy limbs often clip into the environment. Deckard's magic stun pulse should interrupt your weapon's reload cycle. Picking up a new weapon should also interrupt reloading. Neither do, and both cause unwelcome stress. And finally, the werewolves are way over-used, start to finish. It begins to feel like filler.

In this saturated and costly holiday season it's difficult to recommend Legendary (and its warts) unless you're really jonesing for another shooter. After you've navigated through this fall's unequivocal must-plays, however, by all means come back to Legendary and feed a few rockets to a Kraken.

parting **shot**

What makes Legendary so very brittle does not break it. Rent or buy it on sale; it's fine for a lazy weekend of monster slaughter. The inclusion of creatures in vs. multiplayer is cool.

Cheating Death
is one thing...

But mess with his
kid and there will
be hell to pay!

Fusion Publishing presents

DEATH JR. AND THE CRYOGENIC STORM

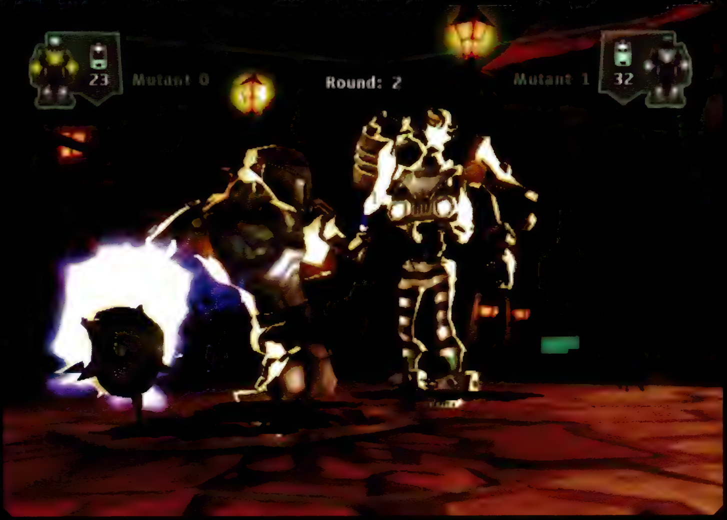
A full-color graphic novel written by Dave Halverson and featuring the art of Robert Duenas. On sale at major book emporiums everywhere this winter.

For information on how to order and get your free gift visit us on the web at playmagazine.com/djcryostorm

Prepare to see death and Death Jr. in a whole new light...

© 2008 Backbone Entertainment. The Death, Jr. name, logo and characters are trademarks of Backbone Entertainment, a Foundation 9 Entertainment Studio. All rights reserved. ©2008 Fusion Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved

System: Wii, PS2, NDS | **Developer:** Backbone Vancover | **Publisher:** Eidos | **ESRB:** 10+ | **Available:** Now



Monster Lab

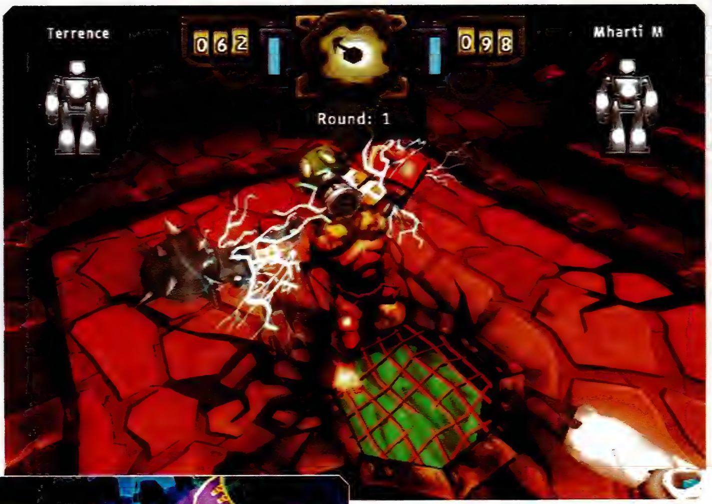
Recipes for disaster

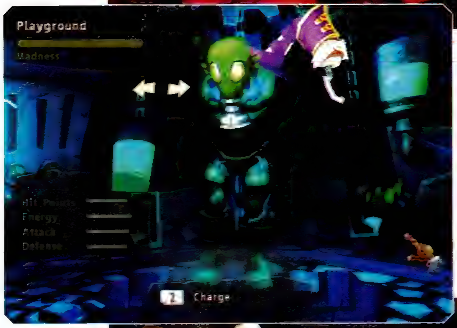
words Dave Halverson

A fascination, if not undying obsession, for monsters is like a right of passage. Show me a guy who grew up not loving monsters and I'll show you Clay Aiken. For me, like many, it began with Godzilla, segued into dinosaurs, and ultimately helped shape me into the freak I am today: far too infatuated with video games, anime, sci-fi, and of course more monsters. To think where we'd be without them; how all that sleep we lost staring at the closet door might have affected us, or all those classes we spent either zoned-out or drawing monsters on our Trapper Keepers. We might all be dentists. What would we have pulverized in all those great video games that so aptly warped our fragile little minds? Or how about this—without monsters…no Thriller video. Yeah, I know, scary.

In the interest of future generations, Backbone Entertainment is bringing the Monster Lab home (for about 50 simoleons, Wii not included.) You begin the game as an apprentice scientist under the tutelage of Professor Fuseless, learning to build and fight monsters from the Workshop. After a few strolls around Cobbleshire fending off lesser creations of the evil Baron Mharti (the resident bad guy), the mad science begins. By using the Weld-o-Tron to create arms, the Robo-Evolver for heads, the Fusion Compactor for bodies, and the Hyper-Chopper for legs, combining a key and secondary ingredient, and completing the related mini-game you begin to create and stockpile stronger and stronger parts. Once deployed, you'll complete challenges (more cool mini-games), missions and rack up wins until you're strong enough to take on whatever is standing between you and the next region or laboratory. Once you graduate from Fuseless's metal workshop it's onto the Bio-Chamber where the sultry Dr. Sonderbar begins your biological training vis-à-vis new apparatuses such as the Stitch-o-Matic and Arm-aggedon and their respective new mini-games. After Cobbleshire, the challengers and missions mount, fighting and curing whatever ails the Everglades and Tombstone Rise, and later as you open the Arcanium (alchemy) lab, The Junkstack, Wildwoods, and finally Baron Mharti's Manor. See you in about 300 fights…

Sounds like Pokemon with monsters right? Well, it's really not. There's a lot of method in Monster Labs' madness. Assembling each creation is a give and take proposition. Different parts have different effects on your monsters' well-being, stamina, strength, and power. The stronger the body part, the higher the drain and so on, so there's a tactical side to creation, which carries over into the versus fighting. Knowing thy enemy monster is a must. You attack by selecting the body part you want to hit; metal parts being the weakest and alchemic the strongest, although there's many a gray area. I'd sooner sell my Bread Bag Head and Mechano Floaters than take a monster with a Quill Shark and Smokey Bat arm on a Magnetic Core with Rousty Feet and a Braniac V 2.0. head into battle with a Crab Claw and Golem Arm on an Iguana Body with Vine Floaters and a Sleeping Xulu. As if. The payoff in Monster Lab is breaching each area with your very own creation, followed by the excitement of finding new ingredients to play more new mini-games to make cool new body parts (and if you so desire, to system link to test your skills on the network). Try not to scream "It's Alive!" too loud.





parting shot

The fighting is sufficiently tactical, but the mini games are the thread that keep Monster Labs' stitching taut. Selectively smashing chibi robots, stapling a gaping wound, tossing fresh brains into the head of an 8-legged mecha-skull, welding, tactical bug smashing, and too many others to list, make great use of the Wii Remote and Nunchuk. The design is on the money too. The castle labs, command center, and lightning tower are aptly baroque and the characters epitomize cartoon creepy. Monster Lab is a very well made game. It's very much a fighting RPG though, great for players who like to tinker and invest the time to master tactics, but not so much for instant gratification or fighting game fans. A propensity for monsters, however, is a must.

> "Sounds like Pokemon with monsters right? Well, it's really not. There's a lot of method in Monster Labs' madness"

Either you get it.

LIFESTYLE+TECH+MUSIC+MOVIES+SCIENCE+CROAKINGS OF DOOM

geek™

MONTHLY

SARAH SILVERMAN TAKES THE PLUNGE

Celebrating the Worst Year EVER!

Lisa Edelstein Rocks the House

Sarah Paulson finds The Spirit

Big Bang Theory

Twilight hits the zone

Ben Folds Springs A Leak

Death to Spam

More Holiday Gifts You Must Buy

Geeky Drinks You Must Drink

Playing Little Big Planet

Asian Ball Joint Dolls, Extra DVD Reviews Office Weapons, Rants and More!

As Seen on The Tonight Show and Conan O'Brien

Or you don't.

geek

MONTHLY

May the geek be with you…always

LIFESTYLE+TECH+MOVIES+OBSESSION+MUSIC+ANTIOXIDANTS

Call 800-694-6506

GeekMonthly.com

review | **System:** DS | **Developer:** Venan Entertainment | **Publisher:** SouthPeak Interactive | **ESRB:** Everyone | **Multi:** Competitive | **Available:** Now

Ninjatown

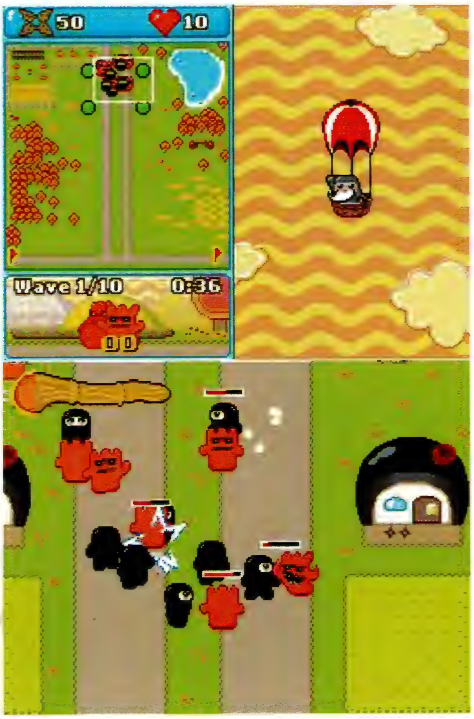
Cute and deadly

I have no idea what license this game is based on, but supercute ninjas living in a *Smurfs*-esque commune seems like a strange fit for a tower-defense style strategy game. Nevertheless, Ninjatown does an impressive job of making a potentially complicated genre accessible to younger players. While waves of demons rush into town, you simply choose patches of land on which to build huts that are home to different classes of ninja. The enemies you defeat earn you cookies, which you can spend upgrading huts, buying new ones, or erecting other types of structures that boost the stats of nearby ninjas. You also charge up energy that you can spend on spell-like effects, many of which involve annoying mechanics like blowing or screaming into the microphone.

Ninjatown is very simple but becomes oddly addictive as its level of challenge rises. Adult gamers can probably find more interesting games in the genre, like the recent Lock's Quest, but this is a good choice for any child or light user who finds himself inexplicably entranced by the cute-ninja aesthetic. **Casey Loe**

parting shot

Ninjatown isn't half as cute as it thinks it is, but there's no denying that there's a fun game at its core.



mayor
Er... Ninja Consultant? A little help?

Wave 1/12
0:43
Direct beam of light onto enemies!

review | **System:** DS | **Developer:** Renegade Kid | **Publisher:** Mastiff | **ESRB:** TBD | **Multi:** None | **Available:** November 18

Moon

Lunar scares

Moon is the newest game from the makers of Dementium: The Ward, and it seems to borrow both the same smooth 3D engine and a similar design philosophy. The game aims for Dead Space-esque sci-fi horror by putting you in the role of an armed astronaut exploring a recently discovered hatch on the moon. But what initially appears to be a storyline-driven adventure quickly transforms into an FPS that uses the same basic stylus-as-trackball control scheme as Metroid Prime: Hunters.

Moon does a good job of setting a unique mood, but the shooting never really satisfies, due to twitchy aiming, enemies failing to react to being shot, and an abundance of lame floating-orb type foes with limited artificial intelligence. The puzzle-solving isn't particularly interesting either, with too many find-all-the-switches type puzzles that feel more like a hassle than an intellectual exercise. But there are a few cool surprises, including solid boss fights and well-done lunar buggy driving sequences. **Casey Loe**

"But there are a few cool surprises, including solid boss fights and well-done lunar buggy driving sequences."

parting shot

This may be the second-best FPS on the DS (after Metroid), but that doesn't exactly make it a game worth playing. Renegade Kid has taken a respectable shot at it, but failed to overcome the difficulties of bringing a tricky genre to low-spec hardware.

HEALTH
8-0
QUANTA RIFLE

HEALTH
4-0
LEPTON SPREAD

HEALTH
4-0
LEPTON SPREAD

HEALTH
53-0
QUANTA RIFLE

review **System:** DS | **Developer:** EnjoyUp! | **Publisher:** Destineer | **ESRB:** T | **Available:** October 31

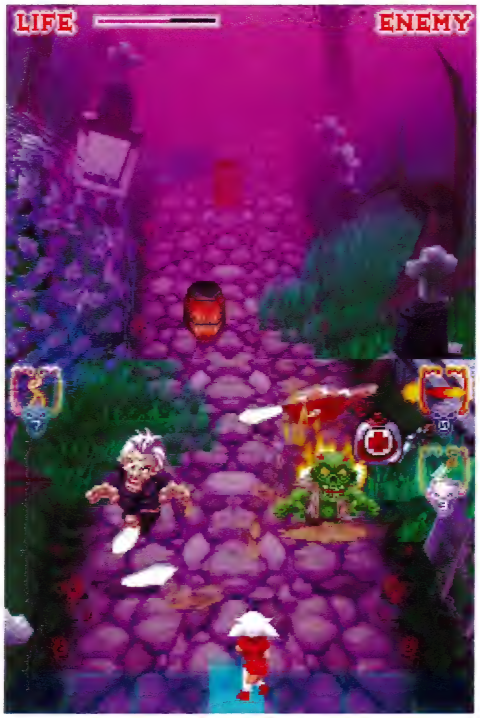
Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ

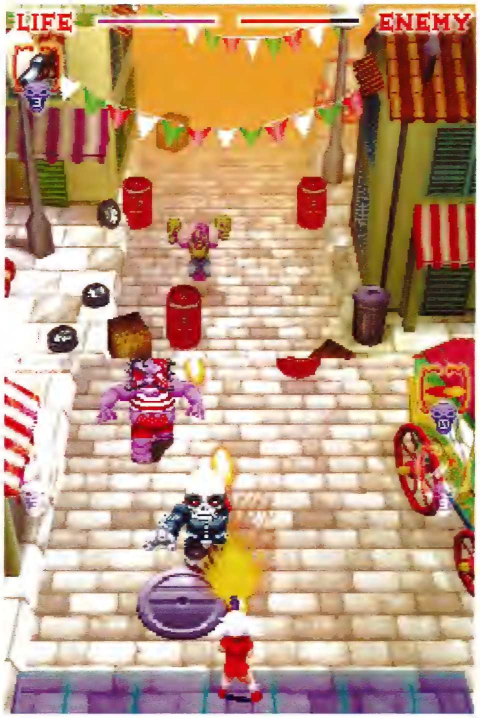
Once upon a tomb…

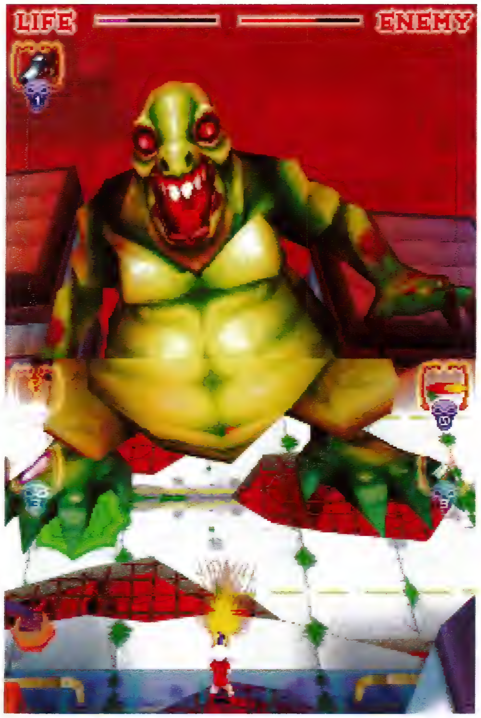
Proving my long standing theory that everything is made better by the inclusion of zombies, comes Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ, a title that proudly places the shuffling brain eaters among our favorite fairy tale settings. Forget everything you've learned from Little Golden Books and Walt Disney; this guilty pleasure-fueled game tosses all that sugarcoated innocence out the window in favor of a twisted take on "happily ever after."

Players assume the role of Red, a heat-packing hottie with attitude and assets—I don't remember her having Lara Croft-like cleavage when I was a kid. Once dropped into this fractured fairy tale, Red ditches her titular crimson cloak and begins littering the world with undead entrails via a variety of weapons—shotguns, machine guns, flamethrowers, and lasers. The top-down action sees the baddies coming at her from both displays, while she remains fixed at the bottom of the lower screen. Players can move her left or right, and aiming and firing is as simple as holding the stylus over your target (raise it to reload.) Additionally, Red packs quick, stylus-controlled evasive and up-close melee moves.

Its simple, addictive gameplay is only outshined by Zombie BBQ's inspired art design; limbs can be blown off, legs continue to march forward after bodies have been severed at the torso, and blood gushes freely. Even cooler, boss battles turn our fairy tale faves into grotesque freaks. Gretel, Pinocchio, Sleeping Beauty and Santa all get a menacing monster makeover. And even Red's bed-ridden Granny gets a taste for flesh, putting on a show that makes the possessed Exorcist chick look as tame as Dakota Fanning. See, told you zombies make everything cooler. **Matt Cabral**







parting shot

Accessible, addictive, arcadey shooter that should be a part of any guilty pleasure loving gamer's library.

SLINGSHOTTSHIRTS.COM
RUN DMC
LYNYRD SKYNYRD
SLINGSHOTTSHIRTS.COM
USE CODE PLAY FOR
10% OFF

play is proud to review games on ALIENWARE
powered by NVIDIA

preview

System: PC, Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Deep Shadows | **Publisher:** Play Ten Interactive | **Available:** December

White Gold

War in paradise

With the likes of Far Cry 2 and Techland's upcoming Warhound and Dead Island (among many others), it's clear that free roaming RPG-inflected first-person shooters are en vogue. Though many would consider classics like Deus Ex to be the seed for these intelligent first-person action hybrids, fast forward a few years to Boiling Point, Deep Shadows' ambitiously-conceived, yet tragically delivered (two patches too soon) open world FPS role-playing fusion. It offered many fresh non-linear concepts in a giant, seamless South American jungle. The backdrop has shifted to the Caribbean Basin for White Gold, Deep Shadows' next stab at role-playing FPS.

White Gold will be the first title to use Deep Shadows' updated proprietary technology, Vital Engine 3. Similar to the 450 square kilometres of game space in Boiling Point, the remote Caribbean country in White Gold's near future scenario will be a humongous asynchronous terrain of huge islands, archipelagos, towns and military bases—free of levels or loading times. You're tasked with investigating grim secrets and kidnappings as a war brews between the government army, drug cartels, native fighters and indiscriminate murder gangs. Open gameplay, vehicles, rich physics and living AI will compliment an extensive character development system and hundreds of quests. **Mike Griffin**

preview

System: PC, Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Deep Shadows | **Publisher:** Play Ten Interactive | **Available:** March 2009

The Precursors

Free will in a galactic sandbox

Not content to develop one daunting shooter hybrid, Deep Shadows also has a second team working diligently on The Precursors, a very ambitious space sim/RPG/first-person shooter amalgamation. In The Precursors, you and three teammates embark on a cosmic journey to understand the secrets of the ancients as a fragile treaty holding the galaxy's factions in check threatens to collapse.

For its space sim ingredient, The Precursors provides a variety of space ships (the first is free—a flight school graduation gift), galactic exploration, ship-to-ship space combat and trading. The FPS portion takes place across twelve detailed planets, each a massive asynchronously-loaded landscape with dozens of busy AI inhabitants ready to enlighten, trade and fight. The RPG element is ever-present, whether managing the vessels, stats, specializations and gear of your adventure team, or mending rifts between rival empires with selective, silver-tongued diplomacy. Mass Effect players may apply. **Mike Griffin**

preview

System: PC | **Developer:** Avalanche Studios | **Publisher:** Emote Games | **Available:** December

The Hunter

If a deer falls in the forest…

Avalanche Studios is back in action with two well-funded top tier titles, Just Cause 2 and… a deer hunting game? It's an unexpected development from the team that had players ventilating rebels and leaping off the cliffs of San Esperito Island in its last game. Published by way of Emote Games, The Hunter promises a spectacular and authentic wildlife hunting experience. It's also a stunning preview of Avalanche's new engine. Just Cause 2 is going to have beautiful forests.

At its core, The Hunter is a hunting simulation anchored by familiar FPS gameplay. Where you'd crouch and sneak up on a guard in a stealth shooter, here you're playing against an animal's realistic behavior and sharp senses. Equipment, environmental camouflage, tracking skills, ace marksmanship and patience will lead you to your prey, roving across large, meticulously detailed hunting terrains. Successful hunters will gain experience points and new gear. In a Facebook-inspired twist, the www.thehunter.com website will host in depth player profiles, tournaments, chat groups, leaderboards, hunting trip photos, trophies and journals, all accessible from PC and mobile. **Mike Griffin**

"…tracking skills, ace marksmanship and patience will lead you to your prey."

preview

System: PC, DS | **Developer:** Pendulo Studio | **Publisher:** Focus Home Interactive | **Available:** Q4 2009

The Runaway: A Twist of Fate

Third time's a charm

The news is both sweet and sour for fans of Pendulo Studio's The Runaway: a third installment of the popular adventure series will arrive next year, but sadly the developer has confirmed that this is the end of the line for Brian and Gina's saga. Focus Home Interactive will handle publishing duties of The Runaway: A Twist of Fate for PC and DS in the fourth quarter of 2009

Drawing in close to one million players across Europe, the first two Runaway titles captivated fans of classic point and click adventure games with its polished artwork, logical puzzles and endearing character relationships. Unlike the second game's cheery Hawaiian setting, A Twist of Fate will follow Brian and Gina through a darker urban setting with much higher resolution backgrounds. Characters are more detailed and expressive and the interface and hint system have been completely refurbished. Pendulo assures fans the third Runaway will retain the humor, easter eggs and novelties that the series is known for. **Mike Griffin**

"…tracking skills, ace marksmanship and patience will lead you to your prey."

preview

System: PC, Xbox 360 | **Developer:** Burut | **Publisher:** Bestway/PTI | **Available:** December

The Wall

Hell no, we won't go

The Wall is an intriguing cyperpunk first-person shooter generating a lot of buzz in Russia. The team at Burut have employed a customized version of Emergent's Gamebryo engine (made famous in Oblivion and Fallout 3), the first Russian developer to embrace the popular middleware. It's not the fine technology that intrigues, however.

The Wall's futuristic premise involves a rebuilding Earth, forever shaken by a catastrophe that rocked its past. Society in the world's new urban centers is on the brink of anarchy as three dominating factions wrestle for power. Picture GTA IV's vast cityscapes (15 geographic regions here), the hijackable vehicles, the herds of pedestrians and sandbox mischief; now imagine cities in the grip of chaos where the population has rebelled against the authorities.

In addition to pockets of focused chaos, the player can also participate in giant AI-driven demonstrations in The Wall. You can rile up the mob, provoking and even leading angry crowds against massive riot squads, clearing a path through the mayhem via martial arts-inspired street fighting moves. Yet these provocations are necessary to achieve peace, the noble goal of your quickly-rising resistance cell. The Wall will fall in December 2009. **Mike Griffin**

preview **System:** PC | **Developer:** Bomber Games | **Publisher:** Bomber Games | **Multi:** Local co-op | **Available:** December

SoR Remake v5

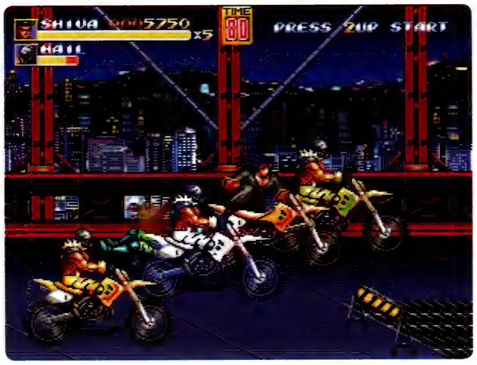
A veritable Bare Knuckle buffet

words Mike Griffin

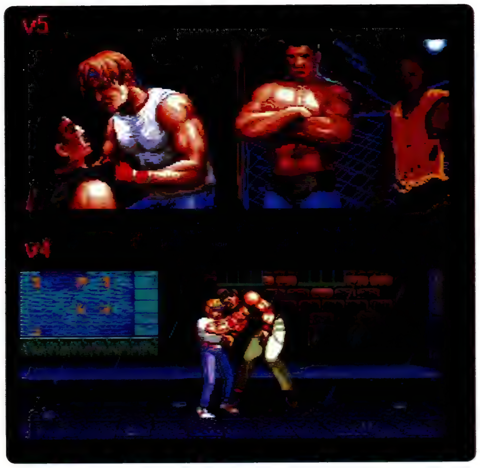
The best fan-made Streets of Rage homage in the world is about to get much, much better. Bomber Games' Streets of Rage Remake is approaching version 5, the definitive vision of a truly comprehensive and faithful re-imaging of Ancient's classic Sega beat 'em up series. Like moths to a flame (or a Blaze), the hardest of hardcore 2D sprite artists followed the release of version 4 and offered their talents and support to the SoRR project. Skilled retro remix musicians came forth to offer new Yuzo Koshiro-inspired music tracks, including a fantastic remix of SoR 3's disco stage. They all recognized the game's great potential. Project lead Ed Bolano, overseer of animation, gameplay and level design, is now free to re-work and re-program gameplay fundamentals while expanding the multi-path campaign thanks to the influx of artwork.

SoR Remake features every character and a vast collection of backgrounds and stages from Streets of Rage 1, 2 and 3. Each character sprite has been given additional animation frames and upgraded to the SoR 2 and 3 art style—including Adam, who lives on in Remake's slightly altered history. New to v5 is the addition of enemies (like Seek drones) and backgrounds pulled from the Game Gear version of SoR. As with every nostalgia-inducing level in Remake, upgraded textures, colors, floor effects and parallax scrolling have been added to the backgrounds, just the right touch of modernization without straying far from the 16-bit aesthetic. All your favorite enemies, such as Donovan, Zamza, Jet and the psychotic Mona and Lisa twins look and move like they've graduated from Mega Drive to Neo Geo, and they're all begging for a Grand Upper knockout.

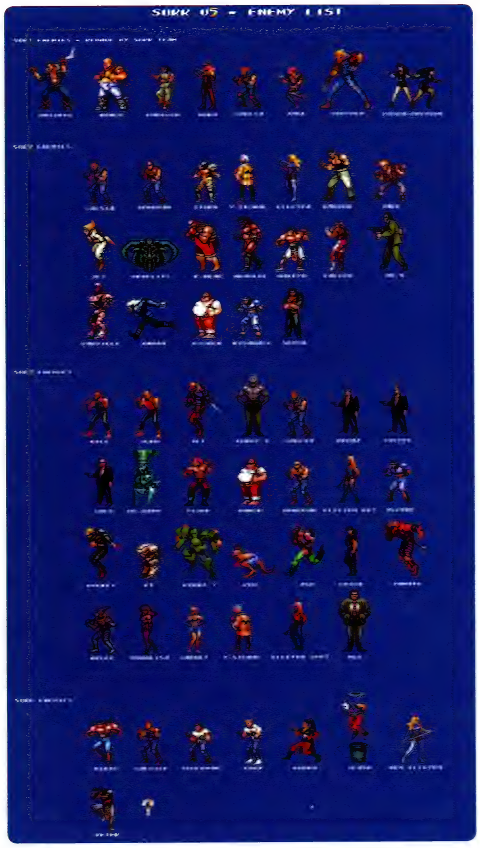
If you're a Streets of Rage fan, you're probably wondering what sorts of gameplay concessions were made to accommodate the fusion of every SoR game. Gameplay in Remake is decidedly SoR 2 and 3 inspired, though it's slightly faster and more kinetic than either game. We're not talking about a Street Fighter Alpha-style leap in timing and moves; it still fits like a glove for SoR die-hards. Moves are tight and precise, contact effects are superior (including sword and explosion dismemberment), and Bomber Games has enabled co-op combination moves for all main characters, even the big man Max, whose game (SoR 2) didn't provide him with proper gang-up attacks. He could toss Skate a mile.



> **"...enemies look and move like they've graduated from Mega Drive to Neo Geo."**



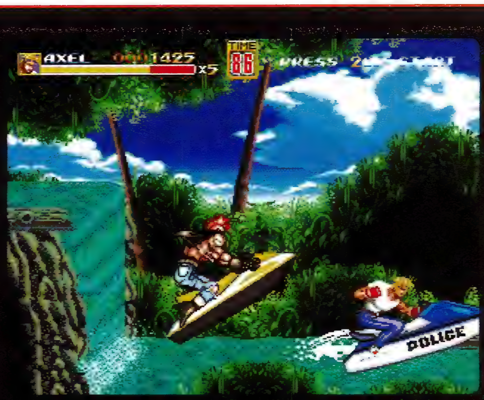
Streets of Rage Remake v5 will include a huge campaign (with unlockable characters and rewards) and several survival and vs. modes, but one of the biggest draws is its SoR Maker mode. With this user-friendly tool you'll be able to build, populate, script and share your own Remake campaigns, complete with branching paths and cutscenes. The Bomber Games team is currently reducing the game's footprint and transporting the palette library to open code in the interest of facilitating ports to console. In a perfect world, Sega would gently move in, work with the Bomber Games team, and get an enhanced version of Streets of Rage Remake up on Xbox Live, PSN and WiiWare.

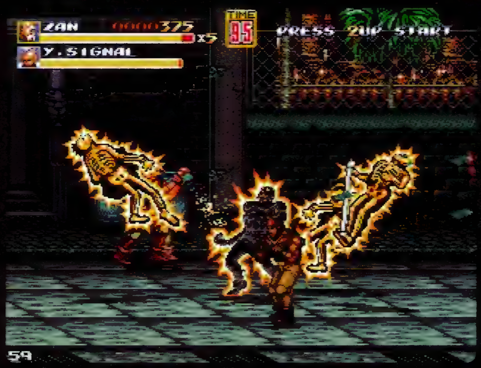


SKATE 0001575 x5
TIME 93
PRESS 2UP START
KEEP OUT

E_cutscene8.txt

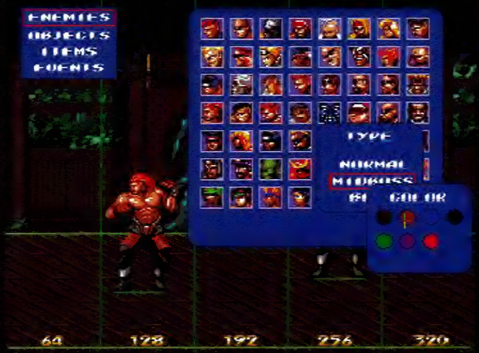
I knew something strange was going on!


AXEL 0001425 x5
TIME 86
PRESS 2UP START
POLICE

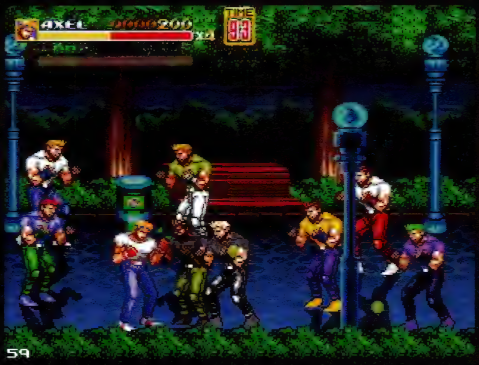

ZAN 0000375 x5
Y.SIGNAL
TIME 95
PRESS 2UP START
59

“...just the right touch of modernization without straying far from the 16-bit aesthetic.”

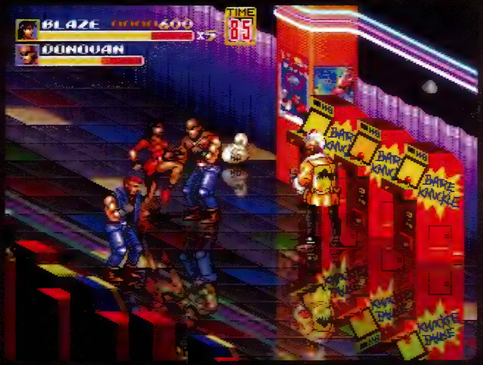
AXEL 0000300 x5
TIME 94
PRESS 2UP START
59


ENEMIES
OBJECTS
ITEMS
EVENTS
TYPE
NORMAL
MIDBOSS
COLOR
64
128
192
256
320

With 42 custom electrocution effects, Zan is a visually appealing character.

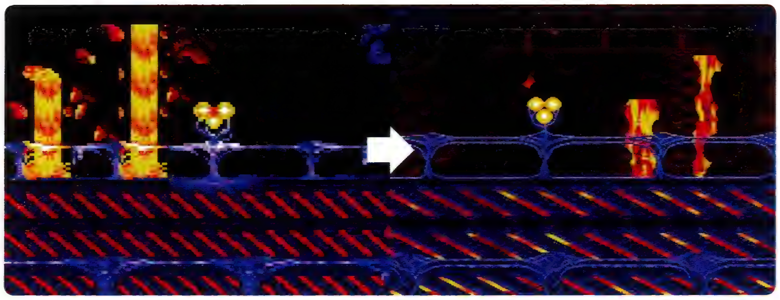

AXEL 0000200 x4
TIME 93
59

Every Remake enemy will have seven customizable palettes.


BLAZE 0000600 x5
DONOVAN
TIME 85
BARE KNUCKLE

We recommend a USB controller with a kick ass D-pad for SoRR.

“...retro remix musicians came forth to offer new Yuzo Koshiro-inspired music tracks.”



Ask Alienware

# 029 | 12_08

In this edition we find out if too much security can lag you out, wax hypothetical about Crytek's next engine, find out if ReadyBoost and solid state drives play nice, and advise a battering RAM to win more Warhammer battles.

q. What's considered internet security overkill? Right now I have the firewall on my router enabled, the firewall on my VOIP modem is active, Windows Firewall is on, and further Norton Anti-Virus is running in active scan mode. I'm totally virus free, but I've noticed some hiccups in WoW and TF 2 that lag me out for half a sec (an annoying half second!). What can I safely remove from my net set-up to make it smoother?
Tony, SC.

Alienware: It depends on what your comfort level is in regards to exposure to viruses and spyware. If you are comfortable with disabling some of the checkpoints, you should test your gameplay with each one disabled individually to see which one is the culprit. When enabling all of those security checkpoints, you may run into some hiccups on your connectivity, but you are maximizing your security.

---

q. Recently Crytek mentioned that it has already started work on the next CryEngine technology, probably coming in 2011-12 (since it takes a good 3 years to build an engine and game these days). It's being targeted towards gaming PCs of the future. If Crytek is able to look into the crystal ball of gaming tech, surely Alienware can. I'd like your educated guesses about the type of engine tech we might see when CryEngine 3 produces its first title. Are we getting close to CGI film quality in real-time?
Luke, CA.

Alienware: Alienware is definitely watching what's coming in the future, since we will be building the gaming PC of the future. Games have taken great strides in producing CGI file quality over the past 3 years. Just take a look at Crysis on the highest settings; it is lifelike already. With another 3 years of technological advancements, it is safe to say that we will all be blown away by the in-game, real-time gaming experience coming down the line. That is what makes this hobby great.

---

q. Does ReadyBoost work well in a system whose main hard drive is a solid state unit? Are the two technologies compatible? I'm also curious: Does Windows virtual memory function any differently in a system with a solid state hard drive? Better or worse? Should users apply different virtual memory settings for SSD than a system with traditional hard drive?
Michael, NJ.

SSD
2.5" SATA Solid State Disk
64GB
Transcend
SSD
2.5" IDE Solid State Disk
64GB
Transcend

Alienware: Yes, ReadyBoost is compatible with Solid State drives. Transfer speeds from SSD's are much quicker than a traditional spinning HD. The best part is, you don't need to tinker with the HD settings to get these benefits. As for virtual memory, it is not hardware specific. As long as you have space on the HD to dedicate to virtual memory, you won't have to apply different settings to accommodate Solid State drives—as opposed to traditional drives.

> "Transfer speeds from SSD's are much quicker than a traditional spinning HD."

q. I'm hopping from World of Warcraft to Warhammer Online, and it looks like my system specs need to improve. Basically I can spend $150 on a bunch of good RAM, going from 1.5 GB to 4 GB. Or I can spend $150 on a new 512 MB video card, replacing my old 256 MB GeForce 7900. Which choice is going to make the biggest difference for the demands of Warhammer Online?
Tyler, FL.

PATRIOT
PATRIOT

Alienware: Go for the RAM!!!! Yeah, you could stand for a GPU upgrade (7900 is a couple of generations old), but you will see a *much* better performance increase with the memory. BTW, the memory upgrade is going to make everything you do on your computer run smoother, not just games like Warhammer Online.

If you have a pressing hardware-related inquiry for the Alienware experts, regarding anything from motherboards and mice to bit rates and firewalls, send it along to **askalienware@playmagazine.com**. Each month we'll award our favorite Ask Alienware submission with a free one-year subscription, so don't be shy!

Please visit us at **www.alienware.com/ask** to read our Ask Alienware archives and learn about our latest products.

Play Online

sponsored by
GIGO
GIGEXCHANGE.COM
Real Games, Real Gamers, Real Money
REAL COMPETITION

Atlantica Online finally surfaces

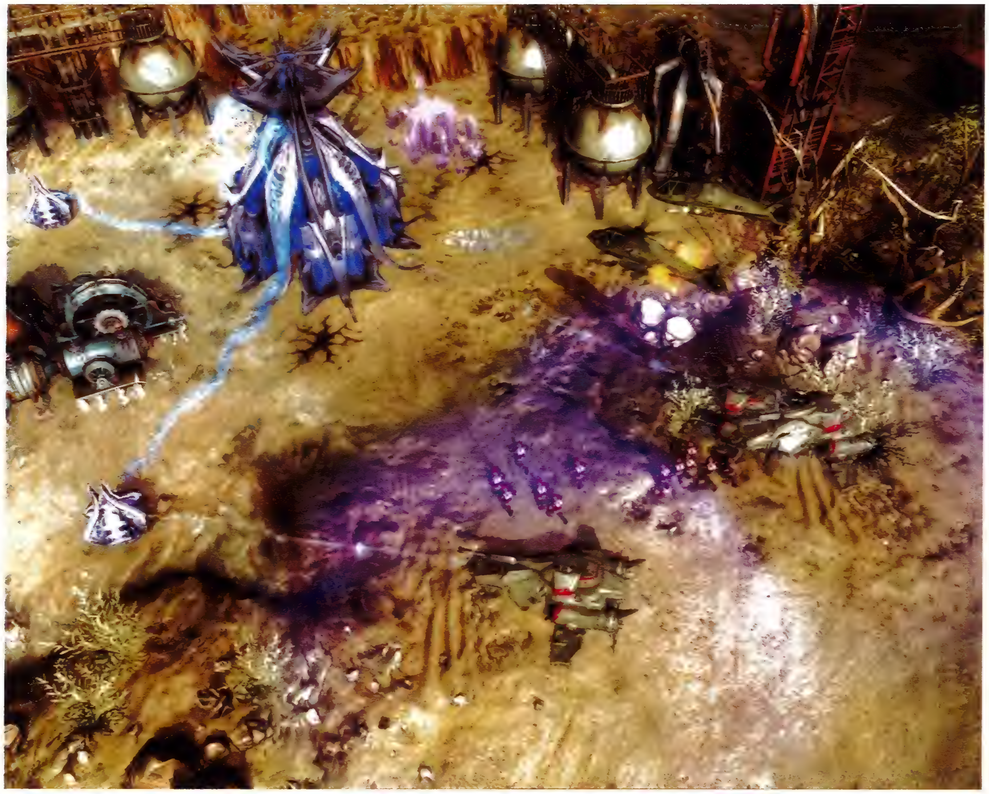
Looking for a little SRPG in your MMO? Quest and conquer through Atlantica Online's strategic turn-based battles alongside eight unique hired mercenaries.

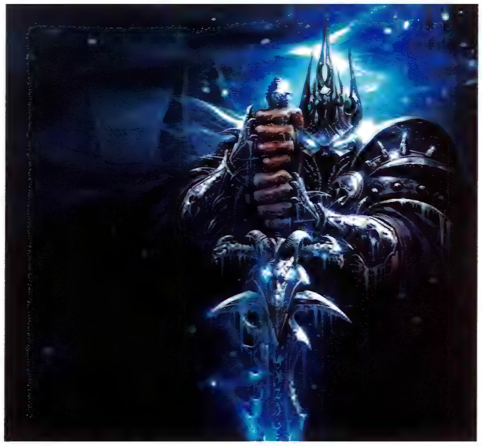
NDOORS' Atlantica Online tells the tale of doomed Atlantis, a civilization infatuated with Oriharukon, a dark magical force generated by four star crystals. After completely draining their own crystal supplies, the Atlantians sent great armies to nearby lands, razing entire populations in their desperate search for more crystals. Hundreds of years later, long after the Atlantians destroyed themselves and disappeared, you take on the role of a descendent of Atlantis, journeying to the ancient ruins of Mesopotamia, the Valley of Kings, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, cursed Taj Mahal, and the battlefields of lost Constantinople to unravel your people's history and stem the tide of mutated creatures running amok.

Atlantica Online immediately separates itself from the horde of Asian MMOs with its strategic turn-based combat system. After engaging a monster on the main field map, you'll be swept into a tactical, turn-based (30 seconds per turn) battle with complete control over your NPC party members' grid-based moves and attacks. These hired mercenaries enjoy 100 levels of character progression, eventually leading to promotion to Hero status. And we all know a Hero unit—with its massive durability and power—can wreak havoc on a tactical battlefield.

NDOORS has also included vast town control systems for guilds, with minutiae to mold such as commerce, culture, military and the construction of new buildings. Ultimately your guild and allies may become so powerful that the town and suburbs evolve into a nation state, attracting wealth and talent in the form of distinct merchants and unique high-profile mercenaries to hire on. Guildmasters can be elected king, and kings can instigate wars against other AO player nations to amass even greater wealth.

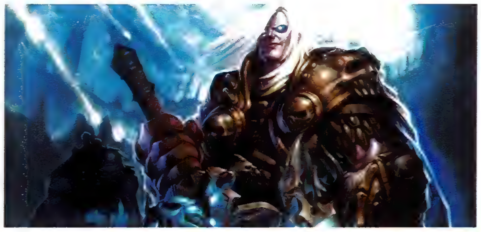
Atlantica Online is free to download and play, but NDOORS is so confident you'll enjoy Atlantica Online, it will purchase your character for $20 if you're not satisfied with the game. Sign-up now to take part in several in-game holiday events with prizes like PSPs and MP3 players.





WoW tops 11 million subscribers

With the Wrath of the Lich King expansion upon us, Blizzard has announced that its massively multiplayer gold mine World of Warcraft has topped 11 million global subscribers. The game's unwavering popularity continues to increase four years into its life, despite the draw of Age of Conan and Warhammer. Vivendi's acquisition of Blizzard was clearly the game biz play of the decade.



Download this!

Champions Online closed beta

Usually our recommended downloads are guaranteed, however space is limited in the closed beta of Cryptic Studios/2K Games superhero action MMORPG, Champions Online. Beta gameplay begins from mid-November onward, so be sure to sign-up at www.champions-online.com. Cryptic is making headlines for its Star Trek Online project, but don't let this promising comic-inspired next-gen MMO (from the designers of City of Heroes/Villains) pass you by.

Play PC **Hardware Roundup**

Maximum gaming at modest prices

This holiday season many gamers will be hunting for PC upgrades to experience top titles the way they were meant to be seen and heard. In the interest of more gaming and less shopping, we present a round-up of some of the year's best buys in PC gaming hardware. Whether you seek to correct your dreary frame rates, game in a higher resolution, or bask in surround sound, we have fine gift ideas that won't crash your budget.

words Mike Griffin

Nvidia GeForce GTX 260 Core 216 / GeForce GTX 280

As professionals often advise, PC users will find that a lower-end CPU paired with a higher-end GPU produces more performance than the reverse and for the same price. While the GPU battle between ATI and Nvidia runs neck-in-neck in most benchmarks, our money is with Nvidia's latest GeForce cards for two essential reasons: physics acceleration and superior driver support in games. When Nvidia acquired Ageia PhysX earlier this year, the game physics revolution wasn't derailed, it was consolidated. Nvidia's engineers perfected their CUDA code, allowing a typical GeForce 8, 9, or GTX series graphics card to harness and accelerate existing PhysX effects. With so many top developers enlisted in Nvidia's driver program currently creating games that employ PhysX code, it's a marriage made in parallel-processing heaven.

This brings us to our holiday GPU picks. One of the sweetest deals in graphics cards right now is the GeForce GTX 260 Core 216, which can be had for close to $250 after manufacturer's rebate.

The "Core 216" designation refers to the unit's stream processors: 216 cores versus 192 in the standard GTX 260. The Core 216 edition is a very powerful 896MB card designed for impeccable HD video playback and silky-smooth gaming on those Very High DirectX 10 game settings you've been dying to experience. If one's demands are even greater (Ultra settings at 1920 x 1200 with truckloads of anti-aliasing, perhaps?), the GeForce GTX 280 is the raging bull in Nvidia's stable, equipped with more blistering fast stream processors and higher memory bandwidth than its already-impressive sibling.

The GeForce GTX cards are SLI compatible, so you can combine two or three of them if your motherboard has the slots. On a tight budget it's not a bad idea to start with a low cost GTX 260, then pair it up with a twin as your cash flow permits. The GTX cards are monsters in SLI. In any case, be sure to choose one of the many GTX 260 and GTX 280 packages (from companies such as eVGA, BFG Tech and Leadtek) that include free, full copies of games like Far Cry 2, so you can flex your new video hardware in style.

AX Pro Precision Gaming Headset

Tritton Technologies' new flagship gaming headset, the AX Pro, features true digital 5.1 surround sound via 8 individual speakers and subwoofers tucked away in sophisticated, comfortable ear cups. It also includes a detachable gaming mic and in-line sound controls. The magic of the AX Pro is in its advanced audio controller box, featuring a digital optical/coaxial interface and Dolby-certified 5.1/Prologic II decoder—ideal for booming, rich surround sound gaming on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360. No need for costly receivers or sound cards.

FRONT
REAR
CENTER
SUB

Samsung T240 Widescreen LCD monitor

Could this be the perfect PC gaming monitor? Among all current 24-inch gaming-grade LCD monitors, none can match the price vs. performance of Samsung's striking T240. This beautiful, gently tinted display boasts 1920 x 1200 resolution, 20,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio and 5ms response time, with extremely consistent colors and backlighting. It's the perfect desktop companion for beyond-HD PC gaming and 1080p console games or Blu-ray movies. The T240 features USB, VGA, DVI, optical audio and HDMI ports, ensuring a plethora of connections for your PC and high-def devices.

NPD GROUP

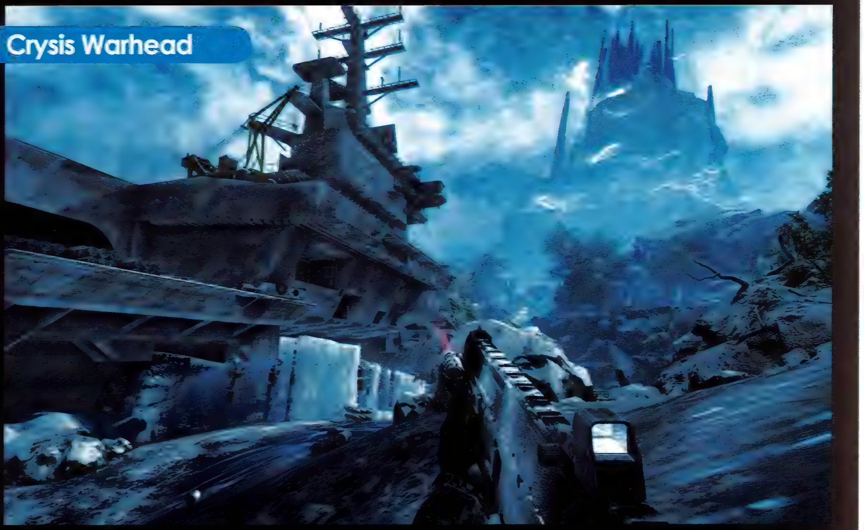
PC DATABASE

POWERED BY OCZ Technology

December **2008**

Top-Selling PC Titles September 2008

01	Spore	EA Maxis
02	Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning	EA Mythic
03	The Sims 2 Apartment Life	EA
04	Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning Collector's Edition	EA Mythic
05	Spore Galactic Edition	EA Maxis
06	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	Blizzard
07	Crysis Warhead	Crytek (Publisher: EA)
08	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	EA Maxis
09	World Of Warcraft	Blizzard
10	Spore Creature Creator	EA Maxis


Crysis Warhead

Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning

OCZ Makes Holiday Shopping for Geeks and Gamers a Cinch

For the n00B Gamer

Gamers not only want performance, they *need* performance. OCZ's NVIDIA® SLI™-Ready memory kits give gamers that extra edge they crave. Designed to significantly increase performance levels of entire SLI platforms, these modules feature special settings s that act as an integrated "plug and play" overclocking tool. Just plug them in and feel the difference.

NVIDIA
SLI
READY

For the Gamer Geek

Thought you couldn't get geekier than building your very own gaming rig? Think again. OCZ has a series of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Gaming notebooks so the geekiest of gamers can game anytime, anywhere on a laptop they built themselves! OCZ's visionary DIY initiative was inspired by enthusiasts, but created for everyone. For support unlike any other DIY notebook product, OCZ's program makes it easy and convenient to build your own notebook by detailing validated components, the assembling process, and offering direct online and toll-free support for true peace of mind from beginning to end.

DIY GAMING NOTEBOOK

For the Show-off Gamer

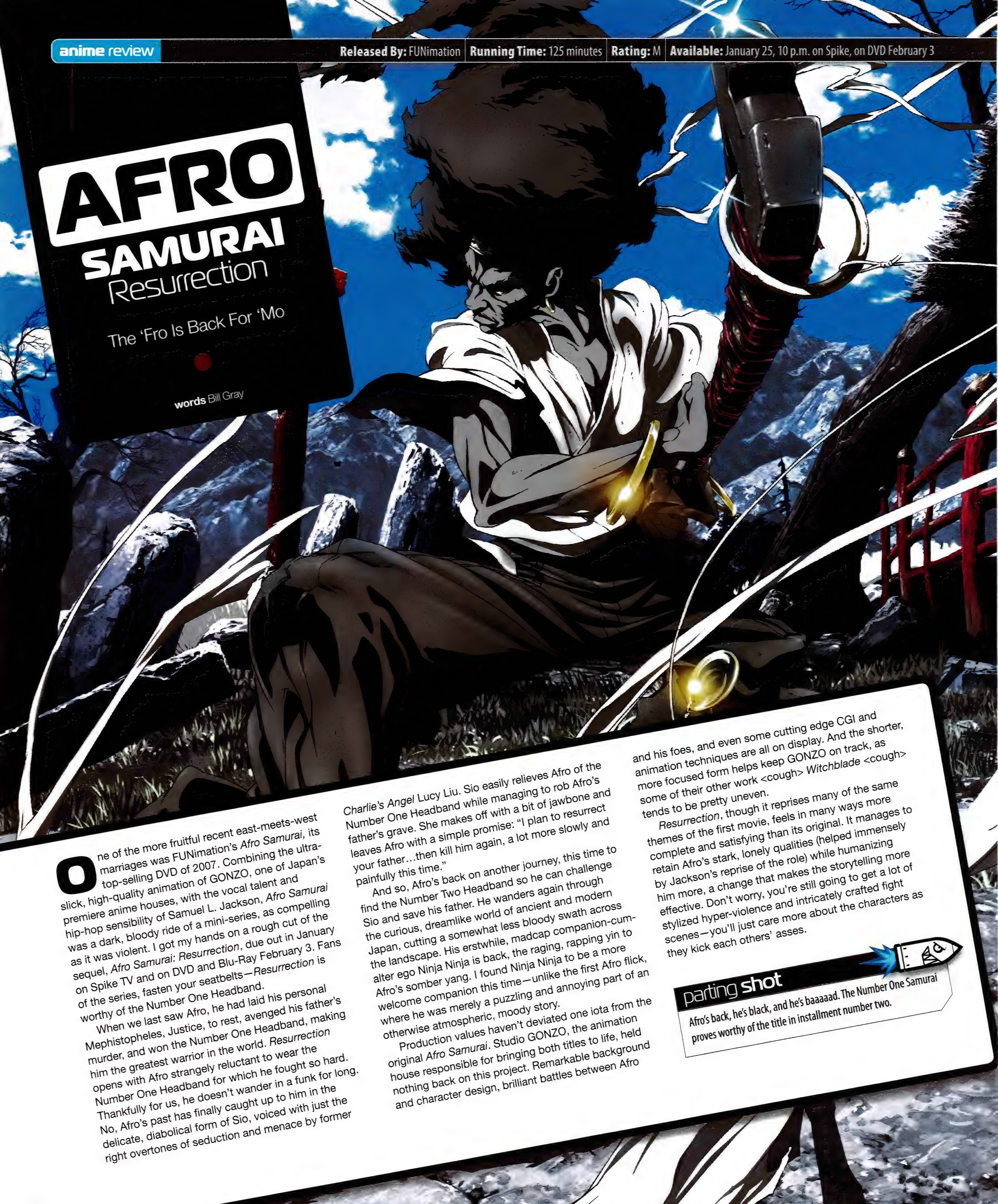
"Look Ma! No hands!" OCZ's Neural Impulse Actuator or "nia" marks a new era in gaming. The nia allows you to bind the corresponding keys/mouse clicks for running, jumping, shooting, strafing, etc to electrical biosignals picked up by the three sensors on the headband and take advantage of total immersion into game play. Perfect for the gamer who likes to be the first to try and conquer new things, they'll be bragging about how they can game without a keyboard in no time!

For the Pro-Gamer

Get the Gear Used by the Pros™.
OCZ co-developed high-performance memory kits with Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, 12-time World champion, to meet the specific needs of fellow gamers. Fatal1ty knows what it takes to win at the highest level of eSports, and these new kits deliver superior stability and performance to gamers whether you are a professional player on the Championship Gaming Series, or a weekend warrior looking to dominate when playing the latest titles.

OCZ Technology, an expert in tweaking and squeezing every ounce of performance out of RAM, has been a leader in the memory market since 2002. Founded by gamers for gamers, OCZ has since been on a mission to deliver the very best PC gaming products to the masses.

Released By: FUNimation | **Running Time:** 125 minutes | **Rating:** M | **Available:** January 25, 10 p.m. on Spike, on DVD February 3



AFRO SAMURAI Resurrection

The 'Fro Is Back For 'Mo

words Bill Gray

One of the more fruitful recent east-meets-west marriages was FUNimation's *Afro Samurai*, its top-selling DVD of 2007. Combining the ultra-slick, high-quality animation of GONZO, one of Japan's premiere anime houses, with the vocal talent and hip-hop sensibility of Samuel L. Jackson, *Afro Samurai* was a dark, bloody ride of a mini-series, as compelling as it was violent. I got my hands on a rough cut of the sequel, *Afro Samurai: Resurrection*, due out in January on Spike TV and on DVD and Blu-Ray February 3. Fans of the series, fasten your seatbelts—*Resurrection* is worthy of the Number One Headband.

When we last saw Afro, he had laid his personal Mephistopheles, Justice, to rest, avenged his father's murder, and won the Number One Headband, making him the greatest warrior in the world. *Resurrection* opens with Afro strangely reluctant to wear the Number One Headband for which he fought so hard. Thankfully for us, he doesn't wander in a funk for long. No, Afro's past has finally caught up to him in the delicate, diabolical form of Sio, voiced with just the right overtones of seduction and menace by former *Charlie's Angel* Lucy Liu. Sio easily relieves Afro of the Number One Headband while managing to rob Afro's father's grave. She makes off with a bit of jawbone and leaves Afro with a simple promise: "I plan to resurrect your father…then kill him again, a lot more slowly and painfully this time."

And so, Afro's back on another journey, this time to find the Number Two Headband so he can challenge Sio and save his father. He wanders again through the curious, dreamlike world of ancient and modern Japan, cutting a somewhat less bloody swath across the landscape. His erstwhile, madcap companion-cum-alter ego Ninja Ninja is back, the raging, rapping yin to Afro's somber yang. I found Ninja Ninja to be a more welcome companion this time—unlike the first Afro flick, where he was merely a puzzling and annoying part of an otherwise atmospheric, moody story.

Production values haven't deviated one iota from the original *Afro Samurai*. Studio GONZO, the animation house responsible for bringing both titles to life, held nothing back on this project. Remarkable background and character design, brilliant battles between Afro and his foes, and even some cutting edge CGI and animation techniques are all on display. And the shorter, more focused form helps keep GONZO on track, as some of their other work <cough> *Witchblade* <cough> tends to be pretty uneven.

Resurrection, though it reprises many of the same themes of the first movie, feels in many ways more complete and satisfying than its original. It manages to retain Afro's stark, lonely qualities (helped immensely by Jackson's reprise of the role) while humanizing him more, a change that makes the storytelling more effective. Don't worry, you're still going to get a lot of stylized hyper-violence and intricately crafted fight scenes—you'll just care more about the characters as they kick each others' asses.

parting shot

Afro's back, he's black, and he's baaaaad. The Number One Samurai proves worthy of the title in installment number two.

Black Lagoon
The Second Barrage

Going out with a bang…

words Bill Gray

> "Black Lagoon just oozes cool—it's one of the slickest series I've seen in a long time."

Back in August, I couldn't help but think it was about time FUNimation got with the program and started releasing *Black Lagoon* episodes again. This was one of the series I was truly worried about when Geneon bit the bullet, and I'm so glad FUNi decided to reload and take another shot with *Black Lagoon*. With *The Second Barrage*, we get more details of some of the missions the crew carries out. And now, with the series coming to a close in this volume, we can only wait with baited breath while the third season is produced.

But I digress…I'm not here to wax poetic on the merits of the *Black Lagoon* series—Dave has managed that quite well, and if he can't convince you, no one can. No, I'm here to review on the final volume in the series, which is chock-a-block full of violence and gunplay, all wrapped up in a fascinating yakuza story that has major implications for one of the main characters of the series. Oh, and did I mention it has one of the coolest gun vs. sword battles this side of *Afro Samurai*?

Oops, looks like I gave myself away—*Black Lagoon: TSB* volume three, and indeed the series, transcends its anime origins to be simply a good story, no matter the medium. All of the plot threads in volume two are tied off here, from Rock's conflicted wish to save a young female yakuza boss that doesn't want to be saved, to Revi's promise to kill the psychotic Chaka. The volume is almost a self-contained story unto itself—you can enjoy this one without having seen any of the preceding volumes, although a passing familiarity with Revi and Rock is useful. Also surprising is the depth of emotion some of the characters in the series evoke, particularly the young yakuza boss forced by circumstances to try to keep her clan alive and viable.

Animation and artwork, by Madhouse, easily match the high production values on previous episodes in the series, and the original cast is back to reprise their roles for the English dub. *Black Lagoon* just oozes cool—it's one of the slickest series I've seen in a long time. About the only flaw I could find was the absolute dearth of extra features on the DVD—previews and credits and that's it.

For me, one of the more fascinating aspects of the series (and there are many!) is the ongoing philosophical debate between Rock and Revi on the nature of free will and existence. The whole series could be billed as an explication of existentialism, only with more blood, bullets and babes. I wish my philosophy teacher had been this interesting.

parting **shot**

Black Lagoon is at the top of its game, and concludes with a hail of bullets in the final volume of The Second Barrage. BL is required viewing if you're an anime fan, or if you just like intense, action-packed movies.

anime review **Released By:** FUNimation | **Running Time:** 580 minutes | **Rating:** 16+ | **Available:** Now

Ergo Proxy: Box Set

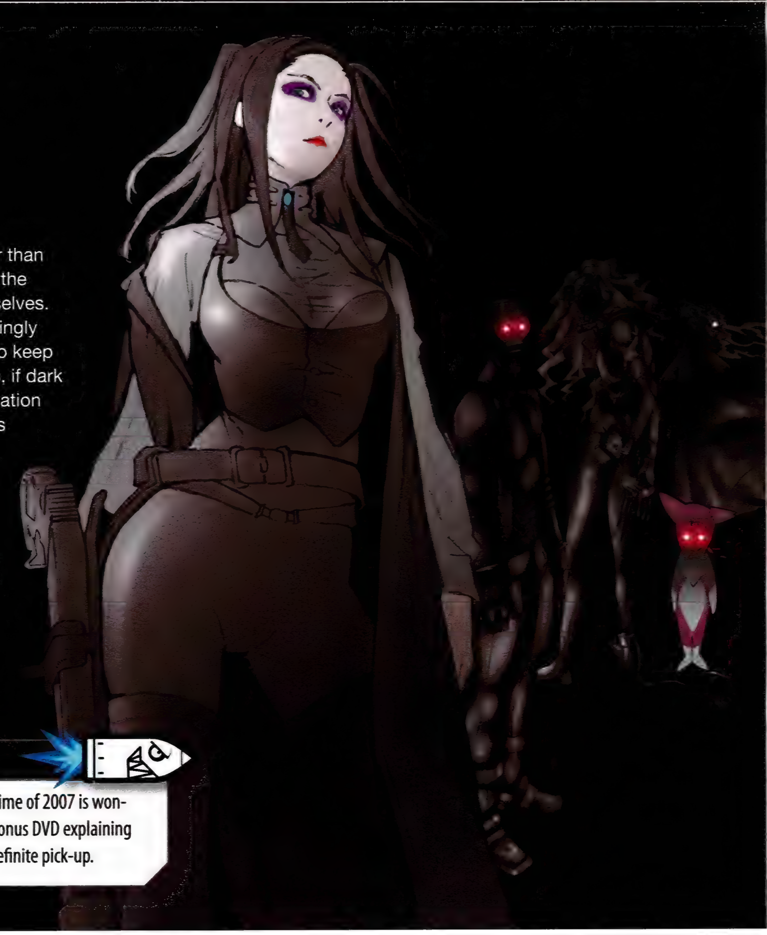
Ergo Boxy

Watching too many episodes of Geneon/FUNimation's *Ergo Proxy* in a row can be hazardous to a good mood, or for that matter, a stable mind. The series is best enjoyed in small doses, like brandy, gorgonzola cheese, or Guitar Hero. So while I unequivocally recommend picking up this handsome, attractively-priced box set, make sure to space out your viewings over a course of days or weeks, k?

For those of you not in the know, *Ergo Proxy* was one of Geneon's last great titles. Set in a depressing, technological, cyberpunk future where humans and androids (known as AutoRevis) populate a tightly-controlled domed city called Romdo, *Ergo* focuses on a trio of characters: Re-L, a police inspector investigating AutoRevi murders; Vincent, an immigrant missing his memories; and Pino, a cute 'lil android on the run with him. The ultra-complex story confusingly explicates questions of identity and self-consciousness, couched in high philosophy, but the main action of the plot is simpler than that—it's the characters uncovering the truths behind their world, and themselves.

Though the story moves maddeningly slowly, there's plenty of eye-candy to keep you occupied in *Ergo*. The gorgeous, if dark and muted, backgrounds, fluid animation and generally high production values cover a multitude of plodding or bewildering plots. And, of course, there's Re-L, an anime female lead who manages to be attractive, cold and fascinating all at the same time. With the box set, you can watch Re-L get the answers about her world she's so desperately seeking—just do it a little at a time. **Bill Gray**

> "...there's plenty of eye-candy to keep you occupied in Ergo."



parting shot

Having all 23 episodes of one of the best anime of 2007 is wonderful. Even more wonderful is the handy bonus DVD explaining some of the trickier points of the series. A definite pick-up.

---

anime review **Released By:** FUNimation | **Running Time:** 50 minutes | **Rating:** MA | **Available:** Now

Negima!? Magister Negi Magi Spring & Summer Specials

Girls, girls, girls

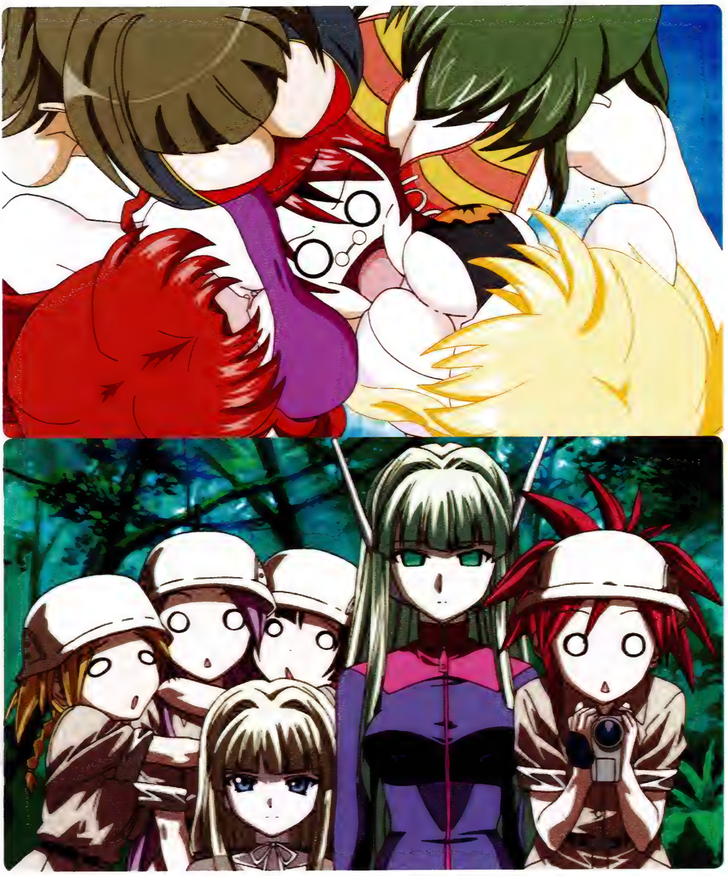
With a sprawling cast and a twisting, convoluted story, *Negima* is quite possibly one of the most complex (and fun) anime series out there. You need an encyclopedia to follow the adventures of Negi Springfield, secret mage and 10-year-old professor at the all-girls Mahora academy. Unfortunately, none of that complexity is on display in the *Spring Summer OVA*. What is on display, though, are the 31 girls in Negi's class—can you say "fanservice?"

Yep, this OVA is a thinly disguised excuse to get Negi's entirely female class first onto a deserted island (and into bikinis) and then into a giant bathhouse (and into, well… towels?). The panty and cleavage shots come thick and fast—flitting from girl to girl in the class while telling two simple stories. The first revolves around Negi's attempts to get Asuna to forgive him for a careless remark, and the second around a botched spell that results in Nodoka and Negi being tied together for a day. In the meantime, each of the 31 girls in the class appears at least once, seeing as how this is an OVA and the directors wouldn't want to leave out anyone's favorite.

The DVD does include a fun commentary track by two of the voice actors from the dub, and production values on the animation are uniformly high, which is nice. But unless you're either really into *Negima* (and judging by its sales, there are a lot of you), or really into gratuitous anime T&A (lots of you too, I'm sure), you'll probably want to skip this class. **Bill Gray**

parting shot

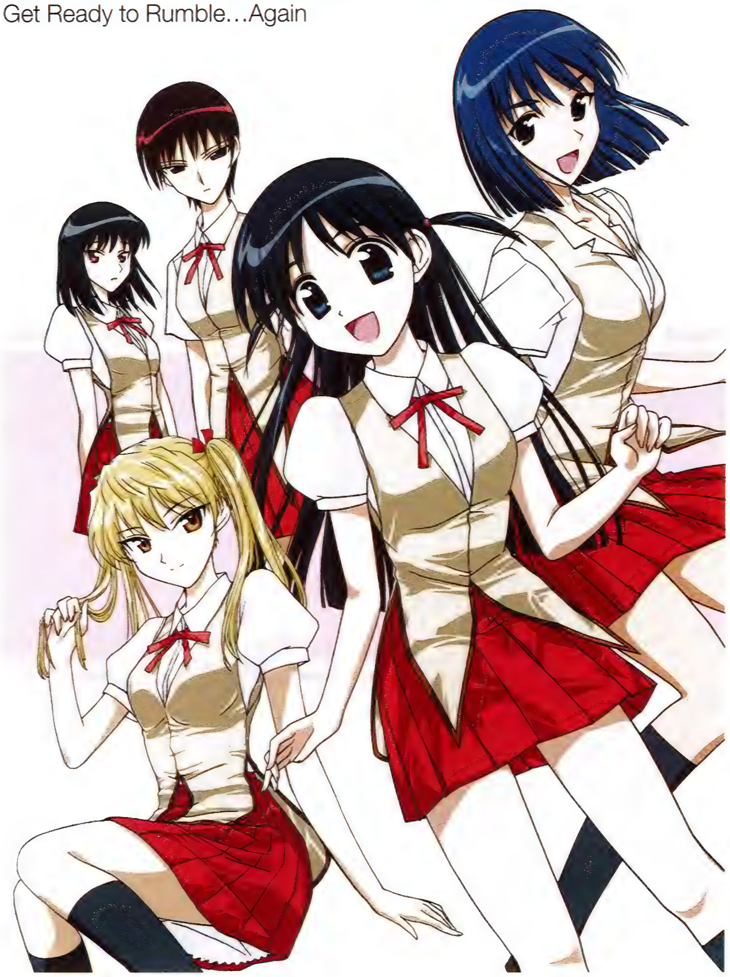
Fanservice galore that's fun for Negima fans and cheesecake lovers alike.



anime review | **Released By:** FUNimation | **Rating:** MA | **Available:** Now

School Rumble: Second Semester Part 1

Get Ready to Rumble…Again



Talk about zany. *School Rumble* has perfected the art of poking fun at the Japanese high-school romance genre while managing to spoof virtually every other anime convention. The second season of the show, *2nd Semester*, takes that formula of variety, randomness, and comedic timing, and executes it flawlessly yet again. And, it even manages to stir up some genuine sympathy for characters trapped in unrequited love.

The series' universe of characters is vast, but generally rotates around Tenma, a sophomore with, as she puts it, "no abilities at all," and Harima, a self-proclaimed tough guy with a soft spot for animals, artwork, and Tenma, though she doesn't know it. All of the old standbys from Yagami high school are here, including fan favorite Yakumo, Tenma's little sister; Karasuma, the over-zealous class rep; and Eri, the spoiled rich girl. Old-school anime fans can enjoy another layer of depth, with sharp, witty parodies and homages all over the place.

FUNimation has started packaging some of their anime series in two parts with 11 or so episodes each, a change from the old days where you just got 4 episodes at a pop. *2nd Semester* follows this format, giving the series an excellent dollars-to-laughs ratio. You never really know what you're going to get from episode to episode in *School Rumble*, and in a series as longstanding as it is (it's up to what, 40+ episodes now?) that's definitely a good thing. **Bill Gray**

> "Old-school anime fans can enjoy another layer of depth, with sharp, witty parodies…"

parting shot

More of the same screwball antics, off-the-wall parodies and references, and occasionally touching moments—only you get 11 episodes this time instead of four. What's not to love?

SOME CASUALTIES OF
war
NEVER HEAL
SUPPORT THE
WAR RELIEF EFFORT
PUMPKIN SCISSORS
PART 02
PART 01
Buy PART 1 & 2 TODAY
BEST BUY
hastings
RightStuf.com
amazon.com
fye
SUNCOAST
PUMPKIN SCISSORS
FUNIMATION.COM/PUMPKINSCISSORS
GONZO
FUNIMATION ENTERTAINMENT
A NAVARRE CORPORATION COMPANY

Based on the manga "Pumpkin Scissors" by RYOTARO IWANAGA originally serialized in the Monthly Shonen Magazine published by Kodansha Ltd.
© 2006 RYOTARO IWANAGA • KODANSHA/ IZUMI PROJECT. Licensed by FUNimation® Productions, Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

The Shop

2008 Gift Guide Edition

THE ULTIMATE

this spread: www.sideshowtoy.com

Blood Elf Rogue Vs Draenei Paladin Polystone Diorama

The first diorama in the World of Warcraft series is a breathtaking polystone statue based on artwork released as a teaser to The Burning Crusade expansion pack back in January 2007. It captures the ferocious battle between a Blood Elf Rogue and a Draenei Paladin, celebrating the addition of the two new races. Up close it's obvious that the artists at Sideshow worked closely with Blizzard to retain the utmost authenticity and realism—the detail is truly outstanding. Each statue is individually finished and hand-painted to exacting standards, then hand numbered on the bottom side of the base. The Sideshow Exclusive version also includes a bonus mini sculpt of a Netherwhelp. At $299.99, this amazing keepsake, limited to 600 pieces, won't be around for long and will only go up in value, so threaten Santa if you have to.

Motoko Kusanagi (Ghost in the Shell) 12 inch Figure

The latest addition to Medicom's amazing line of 1:6 scale Real Action Heroes (available through Sideshow), Ghost in the Shell's Motoko Kusanagi is among their best and most coveted. Medicom partnered with Perfect-Studio to create Motoko with a unique body sculpture and design. She's fully pose-able, and comes equipped with detailed weapons, a stand, and arrives packaged in a beautiful display box. $179.99.

Gears of War Marcus Fenix Cold Cast Faux-Bronze or Platinum Polystone Statue

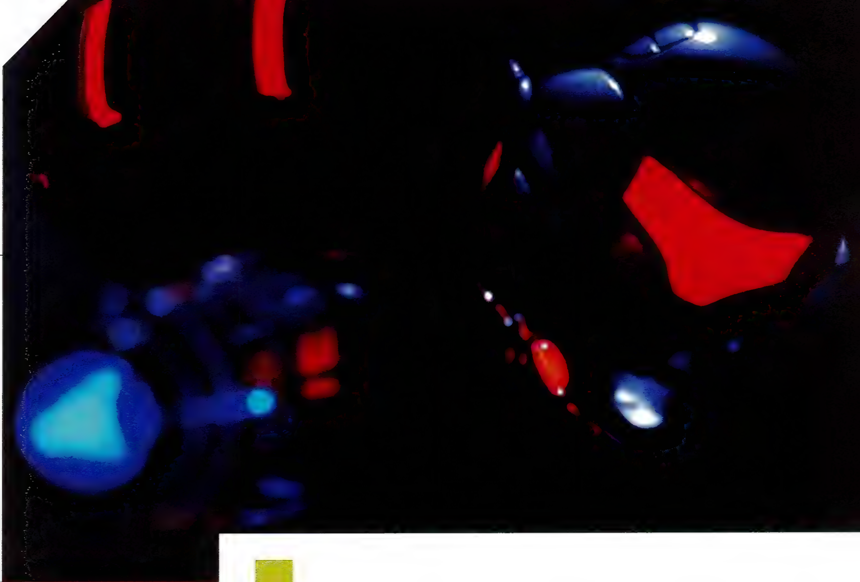
Sideshow's limited edition Marcus Fenix statue from Mindzeye Studio (204.99) is cast in the highest quality materials and then finished with a bronze or platinum colored metallic paint application for a great effect. Dom Santiago and Boomer are also available although the beefier (11 lbs., 12") Boomer will set you back $259.99. I wouldn't want to tell him he's not coming along.

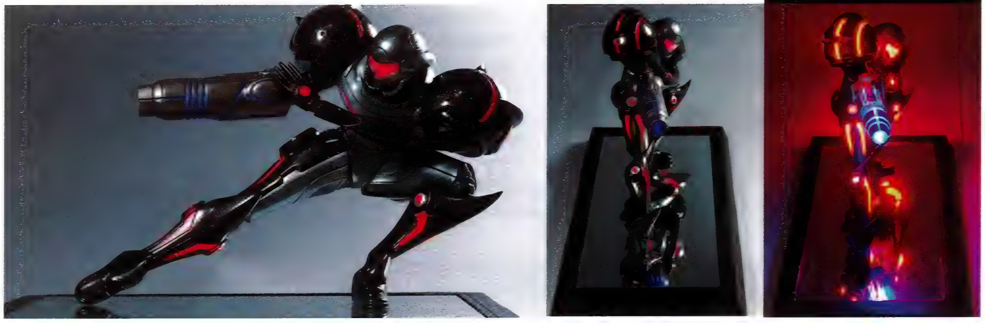
Legend of Zelda Skull Kid Polystone Statue

The second collectible statue in First 4 Figures' Legend of Zelda series (available through Sideshow), Skull Kid (pawn of Majora's mask) stands approximately 9" tall (including the base) and is cast in high quality polystone, hand-finished and hand-painted. Limited to 1,500 pieces worldwide, better hurry. $109.99

Samus Phazon Suit Polyresin Figure

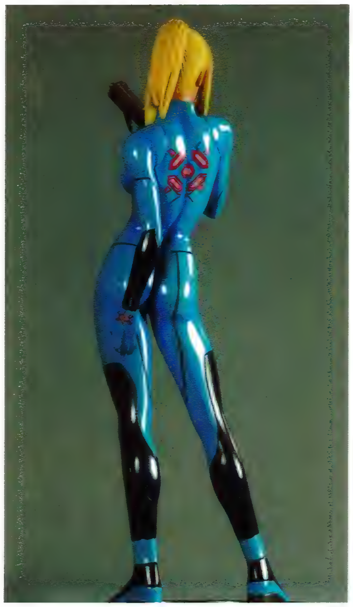
This incredible Phazon Suit Samus from Sideshow and First 4 Figures is maybe the single coolest game related item we've ever laid eyes on. The extremely accurate recreation of the Phazon suit, in a pose inspired from official Metroid artwork, looks incredible on its own, but with the suit cast entirely in transparent resin with over 25 LED lights throughout, and finished off with a mirror base to reflect the light, it's the ultimate homage to one of the greatest video-game heroines of all time. (And when the lights go out, the LEDS slowly fade.) Hand-finished and hand-painted with metallic paints for authenticity, Phazon Suit Samus is estimated to ship Q1 09, and will be limited to just 1,500 pieces worldwide. Pre-ordering is highly recommended. $224.99.

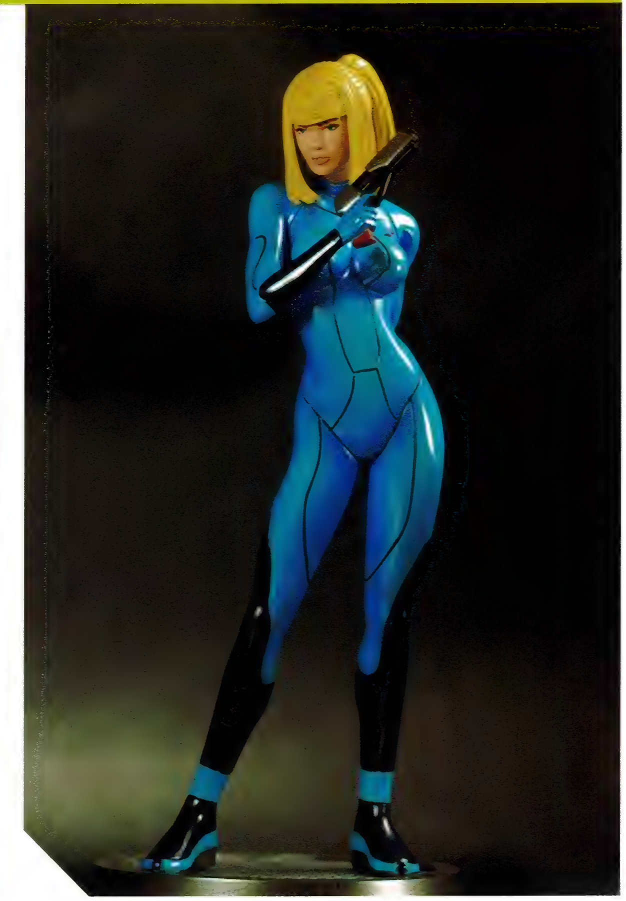




Zero Suit Samus Polystone Statue

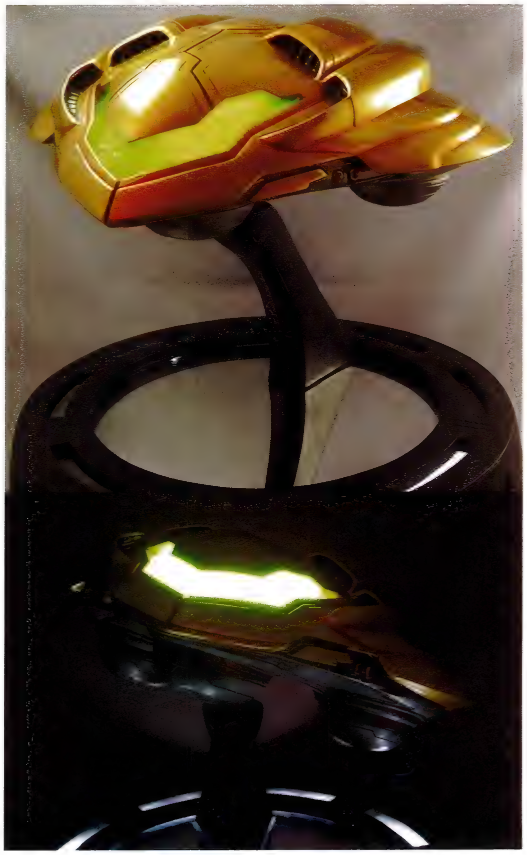
For the third statue in the highly anticipated suit series, First 4 Figures used the official game files to create an extremely accurate recreation of Samus Aran's Zero Suit, which you might recognize from the end of Metroid Prime 2: Echoes or Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Zero Suit Samus stands 9.5" tall, comes armed with her signature pistol and is limited to 2,500 pieces worldwide. Q1 2009, $119.99.

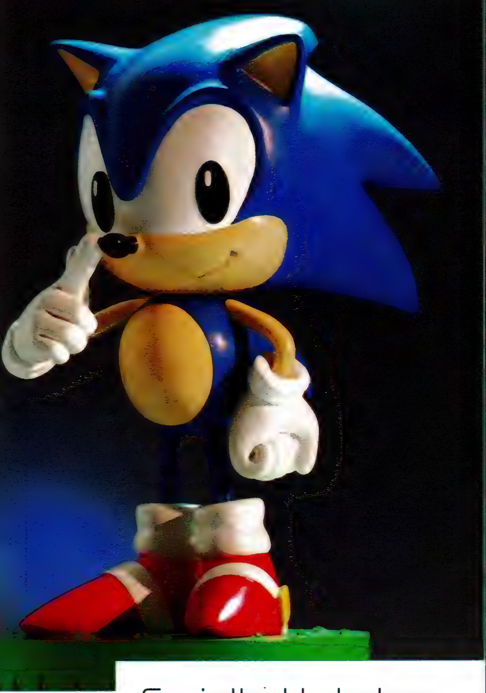




Metroid Gunship Polystone Statue

The first ship in First 4 Figures' Metroid Gunship series, based on the version seen in Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, has been painstakingly recreated from original game files and adorned with over 50 LED lights throughout the model. On the actual gunship, the windscreen and four engines at the back all light up, and when you turn off the lights, the LEDs very slowly turn off with a fading light effect. On the base, there are LEDs that create a circle light movement. The point where the ship connects to the base has a swivel joint, which lets you tilt and angle the ship to any position you want, and each one even comes with a screwdriver to secure your desired position (be careful not to rotate the model on the joint, though, or you'll damage the internal wires). Limited to just 150 pieces, each ship has a hand-numbered base, includes a Certificate of Authenticity, and comes in deluxe full-color packaging. Q1 2009, $299.99.





Sonic the Hedgehog Polyresin Figure

Check out pudgy little Sonic, circa 1991! The first in First 4 Figures' classic Sonic line, this 12" original has been painstakingly recreated from the official artwork for a perfect representation of "the fastest thing alive." Complete with a base straight out of the Green Hill Zone, with a grass top and recognizable checker board base, it's the ultimate 16-bit trip down memory lane. Sonic comes in deluxe full-color packaging, with a hand numbered base and an Authenticity Card. $109.99.

It's a Lego world

Batman and Star Wars Lego sets

Lego games are all the rage. Young or old, skilled or not, people are flocking to them for good reason—man's primal need to snap things together. There's something inherently calming about assembling one of the more massive sets in the vast Lego collection. Now all you need is a place to put them.

DVDs

South Park: The Complete Eleventh Season

Comedy Central/Paramount
308 minutes, Not Rated

You can watch MSNBC or CNN, but if you really want to know what's on America's collective mind, there is only one destination. You know the place—friendly faces everywhere, humble folks without temptations. This was a special year: Butters went off to "pray the gay away," Kyle and Stan went on a pilgrimage to the Vatican, the boys dealt with the escalating homeless problem, and a giant pile of crap was celebrated. And let us not (ever) forget Imaginationland. Whenever you come to that gift-giving crossroads, think South Park, where all the celebrity voices are impersonated…poorly.

THE COMPLETE ELEVENTH SEASON
UNCENSORED

Metalocalypse Season 2 DVD

Cartoon Network
300 minutes, Not Rated

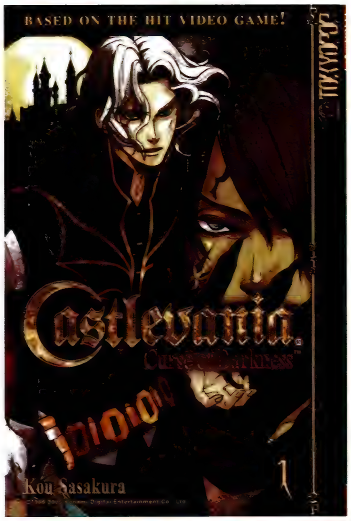
Prepare for the apocalypse in style with Season 2 of Cartoon Network's late night Adult Swim metal masterwork; a Flash-animated smack upside the head based on the lives of the world's greatest death-metal band, Dethklok. See death row inmates executed in concert! Marvel at the first recording on water! Gasp at a fashion designer convicted of starving his models to death! Metalocalypse may not be for everyone, but neither is pole vaulting or harvesting sea monkeys.

BOOKS

Castlevania Curse of Darkness: Volume 1

By Kou Sasakura
TokyoPop

We may have gotten a raw deal this year on consoles—gee thanks for the disturbing fighting game Iga—but with Ecclesia on DS, a movie in the works (everything's crossed), and now a manga, things are definitely looking good for the Castlevania faithful. Curse of Darkness wasn't the best game (although it's arguably the best of the PS2 3D bunch), but as a manga it's much deeper than you might expect. Set in a small town on the Romanian border, where a boy awaits the return of his father—a mercenary in the war against Count Dracula's demon army—two of Dracula's most powerful generals will face off, and we all know where that leads. $9.99.



Sky Doll Marvel Premiere Edition collection 1-3

Barbara Canepa Alessandro Barbucci
Marvel/Soleil

Whether you read comics, graphic novels, and/or manga or not, Sky Doll will snatch you away until the last page is turned. The story of Noa, a lifelike female android known as a Sky Doll who escapes her dogmatic master with the help from a couple of "missionaries"—who happen by the Heaven Spaceship wash where she "works"—is simply extraordinary. A visual wonderland of sexy, heady, science-fiction from French comic-book giant Soleil (in collaboration with Marvel), it's the under $25 gift that will keep on giving. $24.99 at fine book and comic book stores.

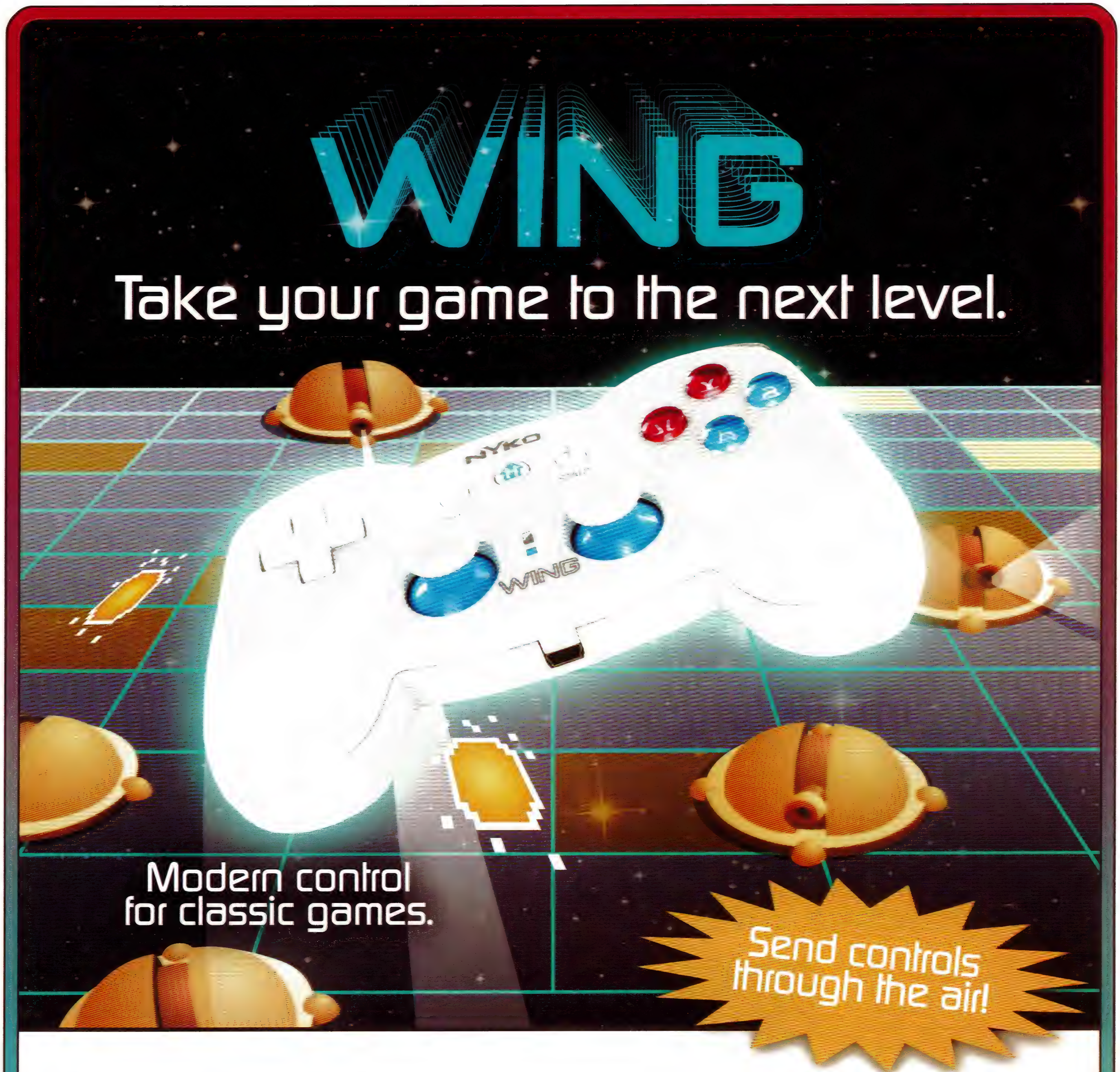
MARVEL PREMIERE EDITION
Barbucci
Canepa
Sky-Doll
MATURE CONTENT

Jordan Mechner
A.B. Sina
Leuyen Pham
Alex Puvilland

Prince of Persia the Graphic Novel :01

Jordan Mechner, A.B. Sina, Leuyen Pham, Alex Puvilland
First Second Books

The first book in the Prince of Persia series is a departure from the Prince we've come to know (and rewind) over the past 3D years, harkening back to a theme and style on keel with the series' origins; probably has something to do with the fact that it's penned by series creator Jordan Mechner, along with worldly wordsmith A. B. Sina. A graphic novel fit for a prince? Perhaps. The art style's not for everyone, but if the moccasin fits… $16.99.


WING
Take your game to the next level.
NYKO
WING
Modern control for classic games.
Send controls through the air!

The Wing™ Wireless Controller is a totally awesome way to breathe new life into Wii™ Virtual Console™ games. Enjoy up to ten feet of wireless freedom – no cord connection to the Wii Remote™ required. Space-age technology delivers up to 30 hours of playtime on two AAA batteries – or play into the future using a USB cable and any standard rechargeable batteries*. It's the ultimate control for the next generation of gamers.

*USB Cable and Rechargeable batteries not included.

Wireless Power

Long Battery Life

Extreme Control

Available at your favorite retailer. Or turn on your personal computer and go to the World Wide Web: www.nyko.com. Ask your parents for help!

NYKO®

©2008 NYKO. All Rights Reserved. All trademarks and registered trademarks are the property of their respective holders.

THINGIES

The market is saturated with home and portable audio players for the iPod, and most of them simply aren't that great. One big problem has been a lack of proper low-end sound, compounded by distortion at even modest listening levels. This latest offering from iHome—consistently one of the best companies to provide quality micro systems—bucks the trend by bringing solid bass with the separate subwoofer, as well as rich, pleasing clarity if you feel like cranking the volume a bit to fill the room. The alarm clock function is always welcome, adding diversity to a system that seems just right in a bedroom setting. http://www.ihomeaudio.com/ $149.99

iH51BR

iHome
10:09
6:00AM

Sony PSP-3000 and 4GB

The PSP-3000, boasting a new LCD screen with a wider color gamut and anti-reflection technology, and a built-in microphone for enhanced multi-player and Skype calls, is available in the new Ratchet & Clank Size Matters PSP Entertainment Pack for $199.99, or in the new Piano Black Core pack, which includes an AC Adapter for $169.99. The new 4GB Entertainment Pack—the perfect PSP for digital media enthusiasts—which comes with a 4GB Memory Stick PRO Duo and a PlayStation Network voucher to download everyday shooter ($199.99), is also out for this holiday season. Now if they'd just start cranking out more games, we'd be set.

Teknocreations InCharge Dual Charging Stations

Teknocreations InCharge induction remote chargers for the Nintendo Wii and Xbox 360 use Lithium Polymer Batteries that give your Wii Remotes or 360 controllers 25 hours of life per charge. Best of all, the InCharge for Wii is the only charging station that powers your Wii Remotes without having to remove the silicon skins or protective covers. Likewise, the 360 station comes with two Lithium Polymer battery packs, so there's no removing the pack; just place the pads on the station and that's it. Each station charges two remotes or controllers simultaneously in around five hours for 25 hours of gameplay (we checked). At roughly 90 cents per AA battery ($1.80 per change out) you should break even on the $34.99 in about 500 hours of gameplay. So, if you play an average of five hours a day, after three to four months (or less depending on your level of multi-player), you're in the free zone. www.TeknoCreations.com

Wii
Wii
INCHARGE

Starts at $1,199.00

Alienware Area-51 desktop

There are some PC gamers who delight in building their own computers, and there are hundreds of thousands of PC gamers that simply go the Alienware route. Play's primary Alienware desktop review units have always been invincible, unfazed by endless sessions in games like Crysis and Far Cry 2 that keep a PC running at full steam. The latest Alienware Area-51 desktop sports a superior, lower profile P2 Chassis and improved AlienFX system lighting.

Our Vista/DX10-enhanced Area-51 came equipped with a roaring Intel Core 2 Quad Q9650 3.0GHz processor (12MB cache) locked at low temperatures by high performance liquid cooling. It can also be configured with the latest in blazing dual cores, the E8500. The installed 4GB of low latency dual channel Patriot EP RAM is ideal for today's resource hungry open worlds, like Crysis Warhead or the wildly popular Warhammer Online.

The heart of the modern gaming PC is the graphics card; this Area-51 rocks an ATI Radeon HD 4870 X2—a single card, dual GPU, 2-gigabyte beast, known to charge through the likes of Far Cry 2 on "Ultra" settings. If Nvidia is your cup of tea, the Area-51's nForce 790i Ultra SLI motherboard can accommodate three Nvidia cards in 3-way SLI, a veritable orgy of shaders and rendering horsepower. With this much computational force driving an Area-51 you'll have no qualms about using its onboard HD audio for all tasks, including 1080p high-definition movie playback (and lightning-fast encoding) in surround sound.

Such a high caliber PC begs to be loaded with games and media, and this Area-51's twin 500GB drives are up to the task. An optional Blu-ray reader/burner provides limitless additional storage. Customize your own an Area-51 today at www.alienware.com.

Keyboard Quiver

By Dust-Off

If you've ever made the trek to a LAN party, you'll know it can be a real handful with all the equipment to lug around. Dust-Off's Keyboard Quiver is a sturdy sling bag designed specifically for the competitive gamer who's constantly headed out to gaming events. It has space for your keyboard and a couple of mice, pockets for an iPod, cell phone, PSP, and your headphones, and room for a beverage and snack. With a price tag of $45, Dust-Off reports tremendous feedback for the Quiver at LAN events, and it's become the official gaming bag of WCG Team USA.

If you aren't visiting **play** online...

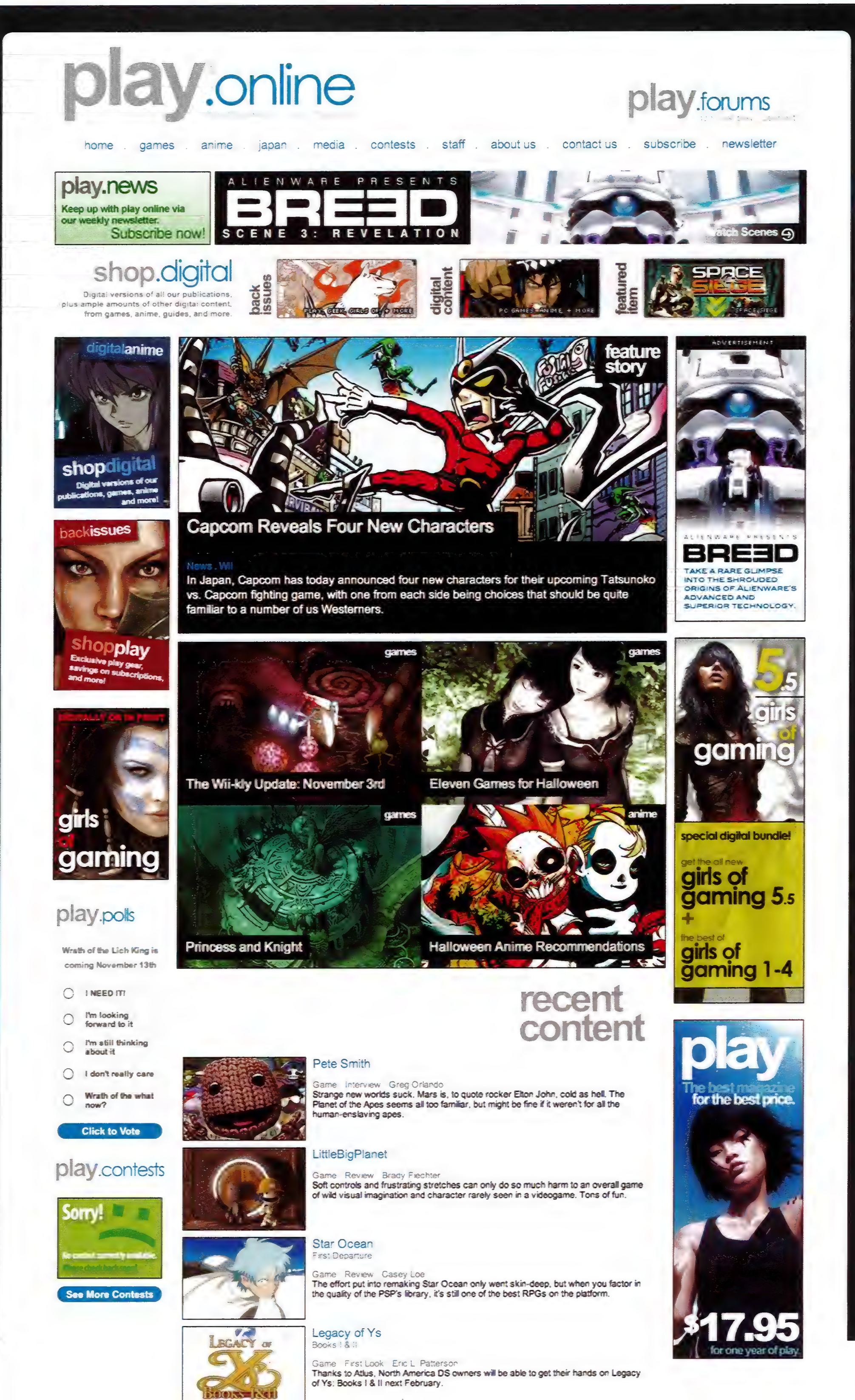
Then you're only getting half the **play** experience!

www.playmagazine.com

Check out **play** online, where we feed your brain daily with mass quantities of gaming, anime, and media goodness, then crank things into overdrive with our exclusive news and content straight from Japan!

We've also got loads must-have play merchandise you won't find anywhere else, back issues of play, signature series T-shirts, audio vases, the lovely ladies of Girls of Gaming in print and digital form, and even the hot new Girls of Anime.

Or just drop by the friendliest forum around and say hi, the **play** way.



play.online

play.forums

home . games . anime . japan . media . contests . staff . about us . contact us . subscribe . newsletter

play.news

Keep up with play online via our weekly newsletter.

Subscribe now!

shop.digital

Digital versions of all our publications, plus ample amounts of other digital content from games, anime, guides, and more.

shopdigital

Digital versions of our publications, games, anime and more!

shopplay

Exclusive play gear, savings on subscriptions, and more!

Capcom Reveals Four New Characters

News . Wii

In Japan, Capcom has today announced four new characters for their upcoming Tatsunoko vs. Capcom fighting game, with one from each side being choices that should be quite familiar to a number of us Westerners.

The Wii-kly Update: November 3rd

Eleven Games for Halloween

Princess and Knight

Halloween Anime Recommendations

play.polls

Wrath of the Lich King is coming November 13th

○ I NEED IT!

○ I'm looking forward to it

○ I'm still thinking about it

○ I don't really care

○ Wrath of the what now?

play.contests

recent content

Pete Smith

Game Interview Greg Orlando

Strange new worlds suck. Mars is, to quote rocker Elton John, cold as hell. The Planet of the Apes seems all too familiar, but might be fine if it weren't for all the human-enslaving apes.

LittleBigPlanet

Game Review Brady Fiechter

Soft controls and frustrating stretches can only do so much harm to an overall game of wild visual imagination and character rarely seen in a videogame. Tons of fun.

Star Ocean

First Departure

Game Review Casey Loe

The effort put into remaking Star Ocean only went skin-deep, but when you factor in the quality of the PSP's library, it's still one of the best RPGs on the platform.

Legacy of Ys

Books I & II

Game First Look Eric L. Patterson

Thanks to Atlus, North America DS owners will be able to get their hands on Legacy of Ys: Books I & II next February.

ALIENWARE PRESENTS
BREED
SCENE 3: REVELATION
Watch Scenes
back issues
PLAY, GEEK, GIRLS OF, + MORE
digital content
PC GAMES, ANIME + MORE
featured item
SPACE SIEGE
SPACE SIEGE
digitalanime
backissues
DIGITALLY OR IN PRINT
girls of gaming
feature story
ADVERTISEMENT
ALIENWARE PRESENTS
BREED
TAKE A RARE GLIMPSE INTO THE SHROUDED ORIGINS OF ALIENWARE'S ADVANCED AND SUPERIOR TECHNOLOGY.
games
games
games
anime
5.5 girls of gaming
special digital bundle!
get the all new
girls of gaming 5.5
+
the best of
girls of gaming 1-4
Click to Vote
Sorry!
See More Contests
play
The best magazine for the best price.
$17.95
for one year of play

Blah, blah, bla

BACK OF THE BOOK

12_08 ERIC L. PATTERSON
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

HELLO? HELLO?
Is there anybody out there?

I think it's safe to say that online multiplayer is now, truly, an indispensable and accepted part of gaming. PC players have been doing their thing over the internet for a long time now, but not only have we gotten to the point where all three of the major video game consoles can connect you with other gamers around the world, but even our handhelds provide us with the opportunity.

So now, ladies and gentlemen, I think it's about time that we actually got serious about the idea.

I don't think I'm going too far out on a limb in saying that when it comes to consoles, Xbox Live is the best option currently presented to us. Yes, there's that whole $50 a year thing. (Personally, I was able to justify the cost until I got married, at which point I came to realize that unless we shelled out another $50, my wife and I could use the exact same Xbox 360, and play the exact same game, but one of us could play online and the other couldn't without sharing one account. Really, that's kind of ridiculous.) Yet as much as I appreciate the fact that online gaming on the PS3, PSP, Wii, and DS is free, none of those services offer as well-crafted and rich of an experience. (Sony's trying, but they've still got a ways to go.)

Even still, the efforts of Microsoft and others are so far from where we need to be when it comes to matchmaking for online games, and I'll give you a few examples of this: Super Sprint, Lost Cities, and Shred Nebula. What's the connection between those three games? They're all what could be considered niche titles, and they're all games where, far too often, I've watched the game desperately tried to match me with somebody else for multiplayer and then sadly give up. A game that is playable online is only as good as the population of people who are available to play it, and the current mentality when it comes to matchmaking punishes anything but the latest blockbuster titles. Finding people to play in these games often comes down to a simple matter of luck, and the options people have for finding and joining games seem to actively want to stack those odds against you.

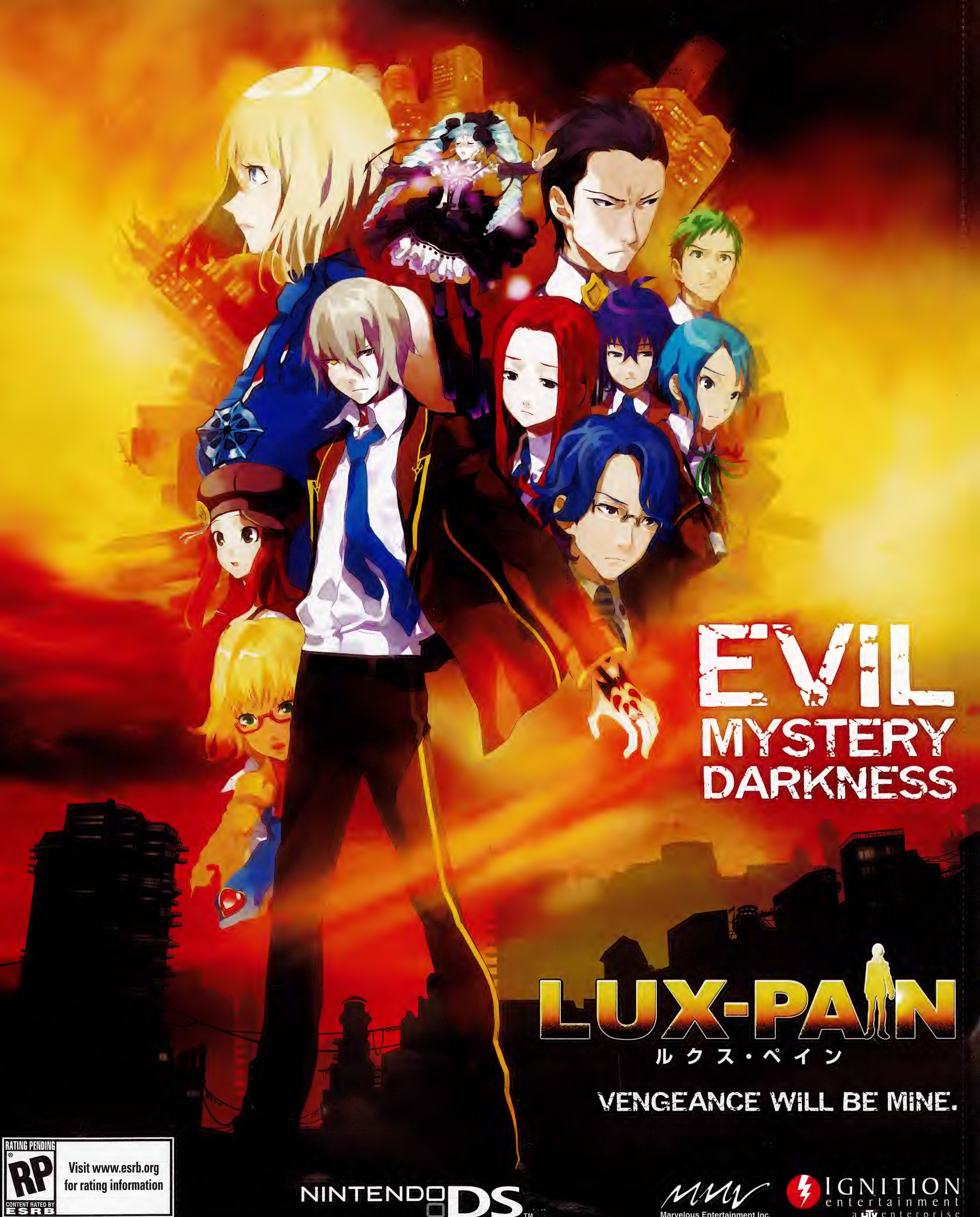
> "A game that is playable online is only as good as the population of people who are available to play it."

I was a hardcore player of Unreal Tournament back in the day. When I wanted to get into an online match, what did I do? I clicked a button, and like magic, a list populated with all of the games that were up and running, what kinds of games they were, how many people where in them, etc.–and that was nine some years ago. When I just want to get on and play Samurai Shodown II on XBLA, I've got to be honest: I don't care about ranked or unranked matches. I simply want to find somebody. What if there's another player online who want to find me, but I've got a game waiting in ranked and he's doing a search in unranked? Why can't the game just bring up a list of all players currently looking for games, host or otherwise, what we're wanting, and then let us decide if we want to pair up or not?

And that, right there, is the key to bringing online gaming out of the dark ages: let us actually find each other. I've never once, in the entire time I've owned the game, found anybody else to play against in the PS3 release of Super Sprint. My guess is, there are at least a few other people out there who are in the exact same situation, and would love to finally be able to race an opponent or two. Why am I only able to tell other people that I want to play X game when I'm in X game sitting at a "waiting for party" screen? Allow me to flag those games I really want to play, and then allow those flags to be found by other people who are searching for players. So, say, I'm flagged to want to play Lost Cities, but I'm off playing a different single-player title. When somebody else goes into Lost Cities to do a search for players, have me show up as a "potential" match. Then, if nobody else is active at that time in Lost Cities and wanting to play, I get a little notification that somebody is challenging me to a game. There's already a system in place via Xbox Live to receive game invites from friends: let me receive them from anybody, and let those people know that I'm out here.

The more great niche titles we finally receive with the chance to play online, the more the archaic matchmaking systems we're currently given become a source of utter frustration.

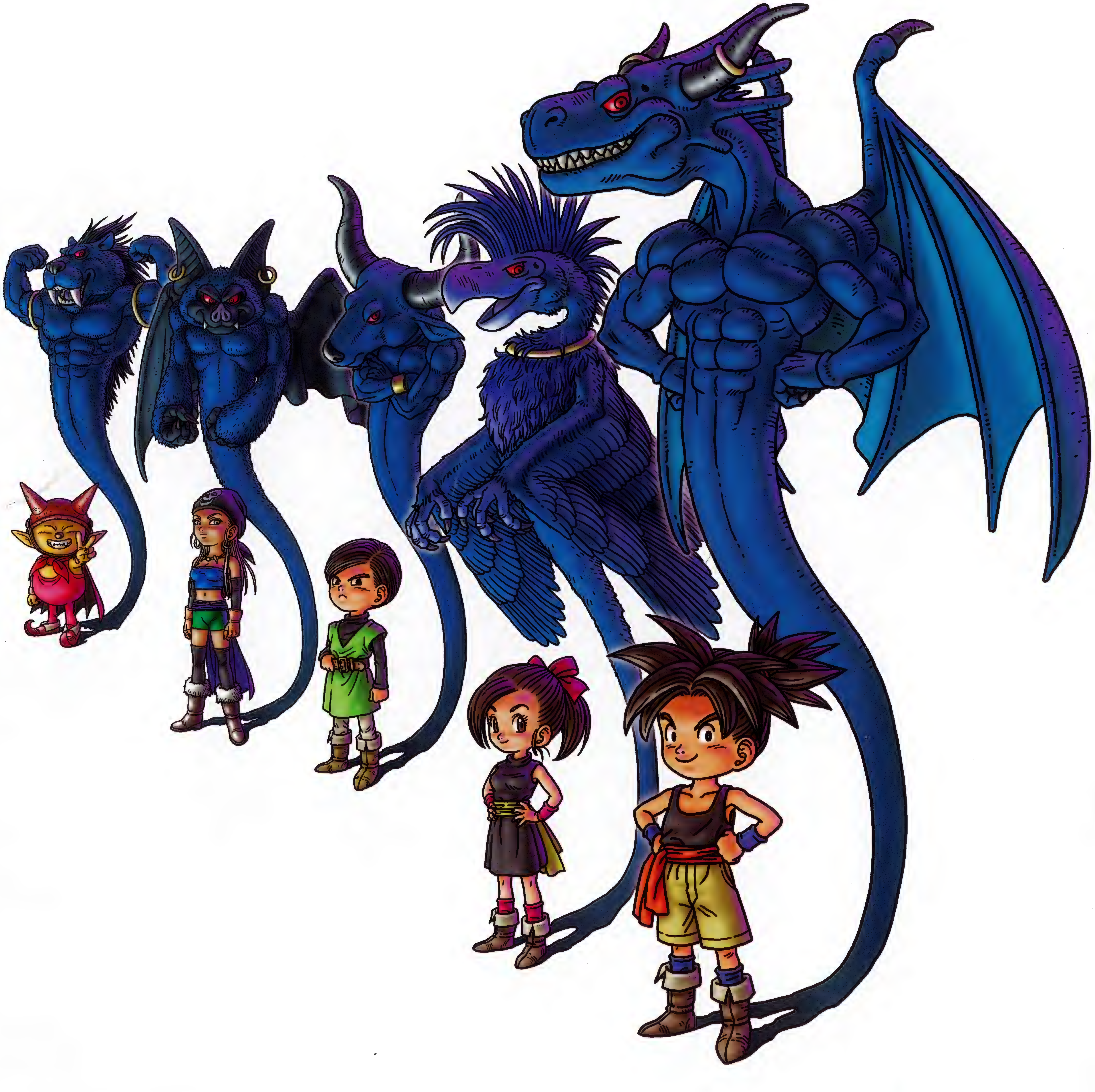
Oh, and while I have your ear, can we talk about something sorta but not totally related? Microsoft, as of this very moment, has a free instant messaging client (MSN Messenger) and a free e-mail service (Hotmail), both of which can be accessed from any computer in the world in a matter of moments. Why is it that very same company produces a platform, the Xbox 360, where to do very similar things I have to carry around a copied user account on a piece of plastic with some rewritable memory stuck into it? Can you imagine having to have a pocket USB drive in order to access your e-mail or message a friend? Why, in this day and age, can I not log in from any Xbox 360 in the world (that has an internet connection, of course), and instantly access my Xbox Live account, achievements, friends list, and even things like my game saves? Hell, even Xbox.com can do a lot of that from anywhere I go. Users of free services can have those kinds of option, but my $50 a year can't cover remote log-ins and a bit of server storage for saves?


EVIL
MYSTERY
DARKNESS
LUX-PAIN
ルクス・ペイン
VENGEANCE WILL BE MINE.
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org for rating information
NINTENDO DS™
Marvelous Entertainment Inc.
IGNITION entertainment
a UTV enterprise

© 2008 All rights reserved by Marvelous Entertainment Inc. /Written & Developed by Killaware. Published by Ignition Entertainment Ltd. NINTENDO DS IS A TRADEMARK OF NINTENDO. © 2006 NINTENDO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

BLUE DRAGON PLUS

EXCLUSIVE TO NINTENDO DS



EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence

NINTENDO DS™

AQ INTERACTIVE

IGNITION
entertainment
a UTV enterprise

© 2008 BIRD STUDIO/MISTWALKER/AQI © 2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights Reserved. Published by Ignition Entertainment Ltd. NINTENDO DS IS A TRADEMARK OF NINTENDO.
© 2006 NINTENDO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98
ULTIMATE MATCH
™
FATAL FURY

TEEN
T
Suggestive Themes
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

PlayStation 2

SNK PLAYMORE

IGNITION entertainment
a UTV enterprise

© SNK PLAYMORE "THE KING OF FIGHTERS" is a registered trademark of SNK PLAYMORE CORPORATION.
"PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

CHRONICLES™

SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA, the SEGA logo and Valkyria Chronicles are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation.
©SEGA. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

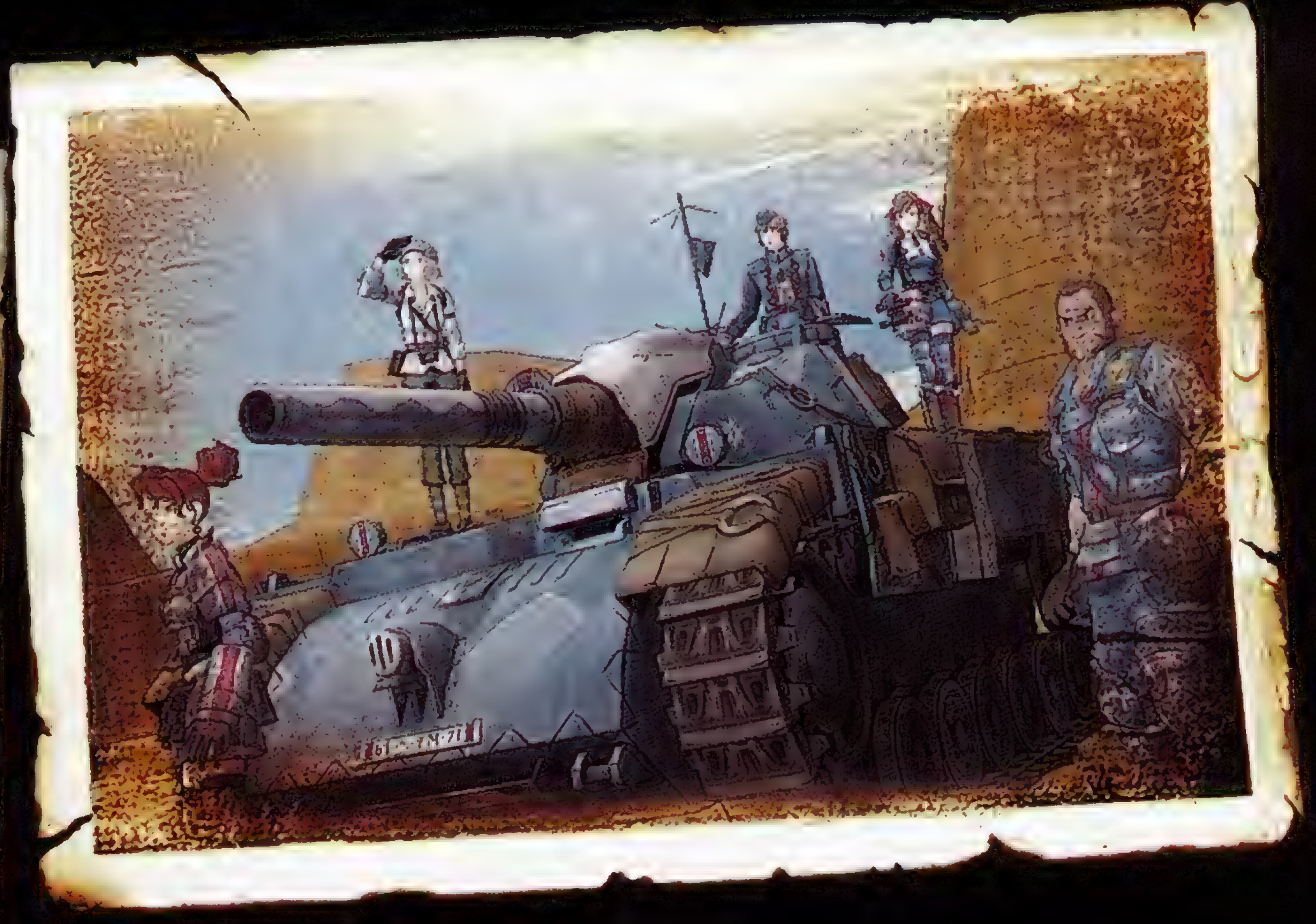
VALKYRIA

CHRONICLES™

Real-time Battles

Scout
Shots
01
BAKOOM
BAKOOM
Edelweiss
82mm

Legendary Warfare



Breathtaking Graphics

As the heroic commander Welkin, lead your small platoon to defend your country against the Empire's invading enemy forces. With Valkyria, a powerful ancient race in their ranks, the massive army must be defeated with elaborate strategic maneuvers and action-packed real-time combat.

www.ValkyriaChroniclesGame.com

AVAILABLE NOW

TEEN™
T
Animated Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Tobacco
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PLAYSTATION 3

SEGA®
www.sega.com

SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA, the SEGA logo and Valkyria Chronicles are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation. ©SEGA. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

–RPGAMER.COM, E3 IMPRESSIONS

LEAD YOUR COUNTRY
TO VICTORY

"PLAYSTATION®3 OWNERS: YOU SHOULD
BE EXCITED
ABOUT *VALKYRIA CHRONICLES*.
END OF STORY."
-IGN, WINNER E3 BEST STRATEGY GAME

"LET'S JUST GET IT OUT OF THE WAY:
IT WAS **FANTASTIC**...IT WAS EASILY
ONE OF THE TOP
THREE TITLES AT THE **SHOW**."

SNK PLAYMORE PRESENTS
METAL SLUG 7
NINTENDO DS
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
IGNITION
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Violence
EXCLUSIVE TO NINTENDO DS™

CAUTION
MINES!
DANGER!

NOVEMBER 18, 2008

SNK PLAYMORE PRESENTS
METAL SLUG 7™
SNK PLAYMORE
IGNITION entertainment
a UTV enterprise
© SNK PLAYMORE "METAL SLUG" is a registered trademark of SNK PLAYMORE CORPORATION. NINTENDO DS IS A TRADEMARK OF NINTENDO. © 2006 NINTENDO

UNCOVER THE SECRETS
OF THE PAST TO
SAVE THE FUTURE

TALES OF SYMPHONIA®
Dawn of the New World™

In the aftermath of the world regeneration, a new conflict awaits. A young boy confronts the heroes of the past to save a world on the brink of destruction.

Phoenix Rush
2 Hits
522 Damage

Engage in fast-paced real-time battles utilizing the powers of the elements

Form pacts with, evolve and fight alongside over 200 unique monsters

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

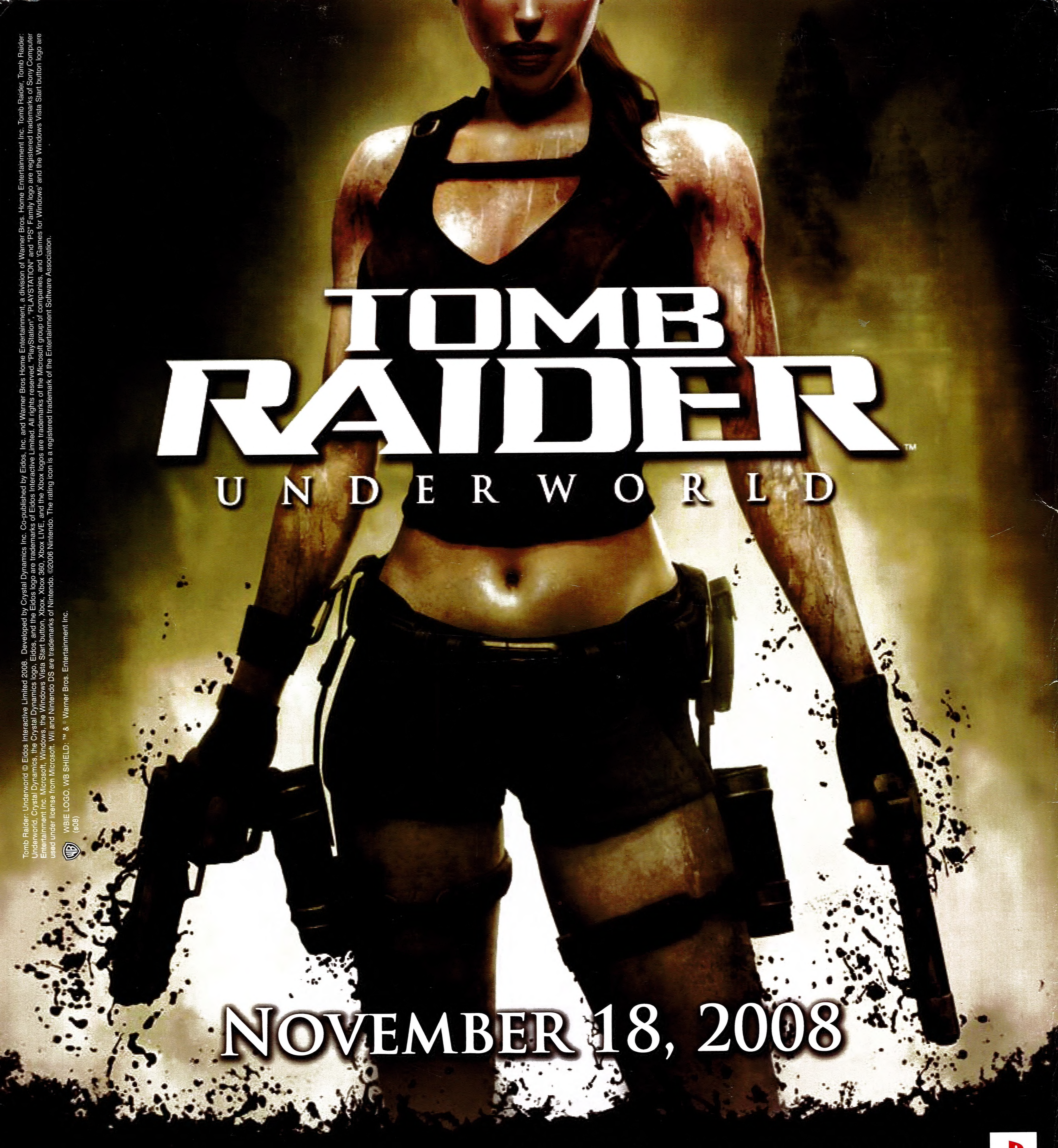
Wii™

Tales 10th ANNIVERSARY

www.TalesRPG.com

BANDAI NAMCO Games™

Wii and the Wii logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo. Tales of Symphonia®: Dawn of the New World™ & © 2003-2008 NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. © Kosuke Fujishima The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the property of their respective owners.



Tomb Raider: Underworld © Eidos Interactive Limited 2008. Developed by Crystal Dynamics Inc. Co-published by Eidos, Inc. and Warner Bros Home Entertainment, a division of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment Inc. Tomb Raider, Tomb Raider: Underworld, Crystal Dynamics, the Crystal Dynamics logo, Eidos, and the Eidos logo are trademarks of Eidos Interactive Limited. All rights reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Windows, the Windows Vista Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and 'Games for Windows' and the Windows Vista Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. ©2006 Nintendo. The rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

WBIE LOGO, WB SHIELD: ™ & © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.
(s08)

Games for Windows
XBOX 360 LIVE
PlayStation 2
PLAYSTATION 3

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

Wii
NINTENDO DS
CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
eidos

SNK PLAYMORE PRESENTS
METAL SLUG 7™
CAUTION MINES! DANGER!
EXCLUSIVE TO NINTENDO DS™
NOVEMBER 18, 2008
TEEN
T
Blood
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
SNK PLAYMORE
IGNITION entertainment a UTV enterprise

© SNK PLAYMORE "METAL SLUG" is a registered trademark of SNK PLAYMORE CORPORATION. NINTENDO DS IS A TRADEMARK OF NINTENDO. © 2006 NINTENDO.

LEAD YOUR COUNTRY TO VICTORY

"PLAYSTATION®3 OWNERS: YOU SHOULD **BE EXCITED** ABOUT *VALKYRIA CHRONICLES*. **END OF STORY.**"
-IGN, WINNER E3 BEST STRATEGY GAME

"LET'S JUST GET IT OUT OF THE WAY: IT WAS **FANTASTIC**...IT WAS EASILY **ONE OF THE TOP** THREE TITLES AT THE **SHOW**."
-RPGAMER.COM, E3 IMPRESSIONS

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES™

Real-time Battles

Legendary Warfare

Breathtaking Graphics

As the heroic commander Welkin, lead your small platoon to defend your country against the Empire's invading enemy forces. With Valkyria, a powerful ancient race in their ranks, the massive army must be defeated with elaborate strategic maneuvers and action-packed real-time combat.

www.ValkyriaChroniclesGame.com

AVAILABLE NOW

TEEN
T
Animated Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Tobacco
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PLAYSTATION 3

SEGA®
www.sega.com

SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA, the SEGA logo and Valkyria Chronicles are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation. ©SEGA. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

VALKYRIA
CHRONICLES™

SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA, the SEGA logo and Valkyria Chronicles are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation.
©SEGA. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.